

SOJOURNERS

ICE

**LOVE
YOUR
ENEMY?**

**FIRST YOU
HAVE TO
KNOW WHO
THEY ARE**

PAGE 22

KEEP OUT!



**NO
TRESPASSING**

**POLICE
ICE**

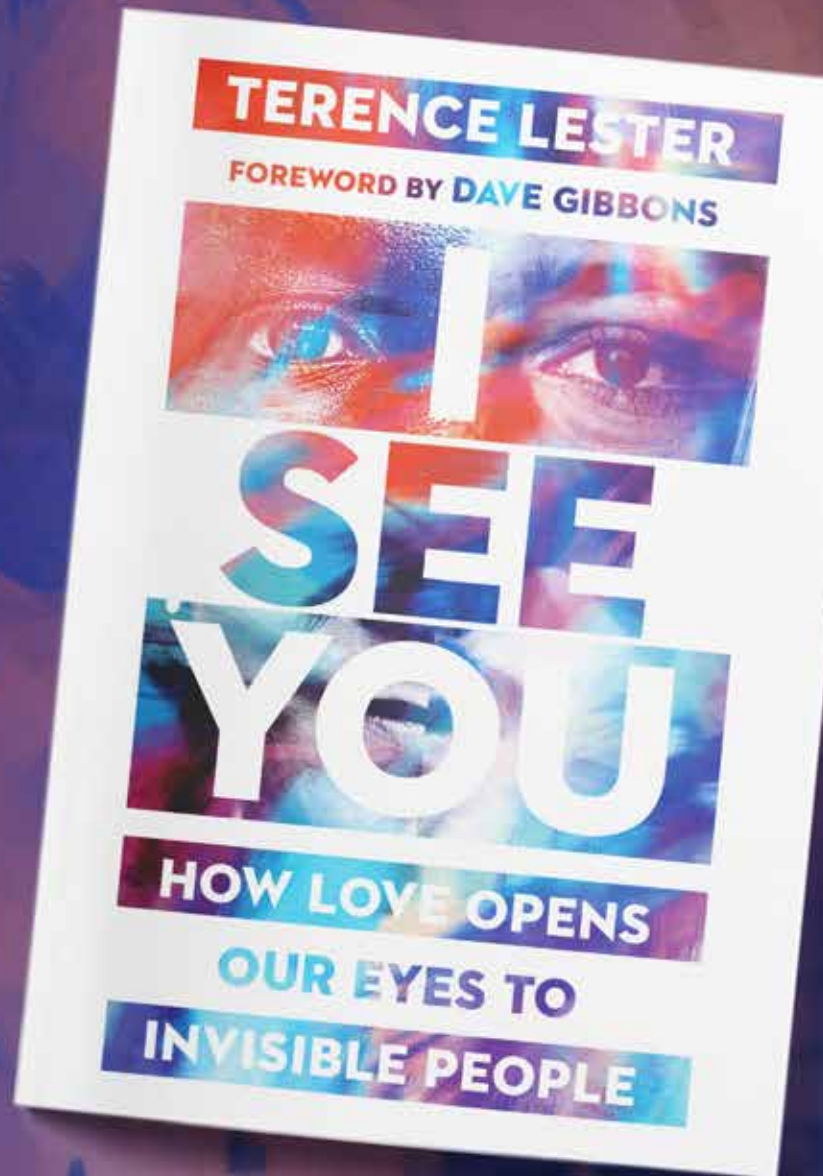
WE DON'T CARE ABOUT WHAT WE DON'T SEE

Countless people—especially those who are poor and homeless—are invisible to us. But truly seeing leads us to act with compassion and justice.

Sharing personal encounters and real-life stories, Terence Lester calls us to **see the invisible people around us through God's eyes**, restoring their dignity and helping them flourish.

“I See You is a riveting, robust, and revealing read by this dynamic young activist.”

—MAYNARD EATON,
national communications director, SCLC



"I WANT PEOPLE TO EAT THEIR WAY ACROSS THE DIASPORAS."

Tales from the Cooking Pot

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Twitty, author of
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From the Editor

With any change comes the potential of disruption. Sometimes that's good and necessary and unleashes fresh, creative possibilities. At other times change can take us in the wrong direction, or at the least be unsettling and disturbing in a world already oversaturated with trauma. And sometimes change can be both. That's evidenced in the responses we've received to the comprehensive redesign we launched a few issues ago. For instance, one reader—speaking for many—wrote that “The new look is wonderful. I love the graphics.” But: “I have just one complaint. The print is too small ... I will have to invest in a good pair of magnifying glasses.”

Readability, needless to say, is essential, and in the months to come we plan to make tweaks, in the context of our new design motif, to that end. We want the magazine to be beautiful and appealing—always in the service of good, clear communication of biblical social justice. And we're presuming that means *without* the need for magnifying glasses.

RESPONSE

“Looks Aren’t Everything”

Sojourners unveiled a redesign with our July issue; not everyone was pleased. “The graphical design unleashed on an unsuspecting readership is a triumph of empty form over meaningful content,” wrote Don Rideaux-Crenshaw of Burnsville, Minn. “The graphics overpower everything—and not in a good way,” added Karen T. Morgan of Norwood, N.Y. Many readers commented on the font: “The print in the new format is w-a-a-a-y too small. I appreciate your effort to include more material, but you’re going to have to address the print size for my age-79 eyes,” wrote Joyce Jamison of Louisville, Ky. “I know you were excited for your ‘new look,’” wrote Lynne Gonzales of Pewaukee, Wis., “but looks aren’t everything ... especially when readability is totally lost.”

Write us at response@sojo.net.



"YOU CANNOT PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT UNLESS YOU EMPOWER PEOPLE."

Wangari Maathai
founder of the Green Belt Movement

CONTRIBUTING



E. Ethelbert Miller

Miller describes himself as a "literary activist," which is "about putting emphasis on other people." As host of the weekly D.C.-based podcast *On The Margin*, he offers a space for writers and scholars to share their experiences in a way that he hopes emboldens "artists to become visionaries." In his memoirs and poems, Miller often reflects on his experience as a young black writer growing up in the South Bronx and losing his brother and father. "The poet's journey begins in the heart," writes Miller in his first memoir.



Melissa Florer-Bixler

The Iraq war was a defining moment for Florer-Bixler. As her anti-war sentiment took shape, the church she grew up in "didn't have the theological resources" she needed. She landed in the Mennonite Church USA and now serves in Raleigh, N.C., as a Mennonite pastor. Florer-Bixler's writing and speaking is shaped by her view on economics ("I have a very 'I hate money' perspective to wealth."). In this issue, she wrestles with Jesus' command to "love your enemies" in light of rampant family separation at the U.S.-Mexico border.

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Percentage of respondents in a 2019 Gallup poll who listed Russia as the greatest enemy of the U.S.

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Percentage of respondents in same Gallup poll who listed the U.S. as its own worst enemy.

OUR MISSION

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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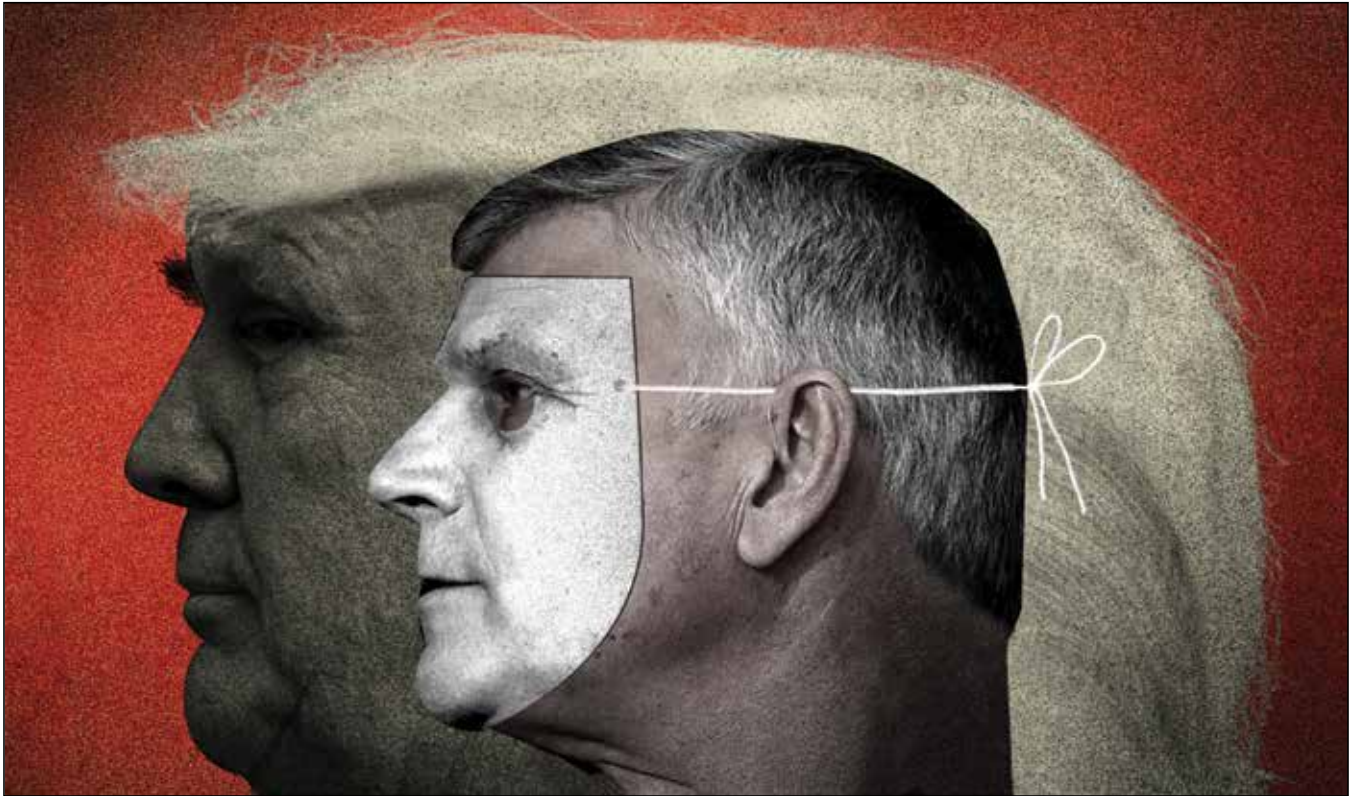
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HEARTS & MINDS

BY JIM WALLIS

PRAY FOR THE PRESIDENT?

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. —1 Timothy 2:1-4

This is a scripture passage that's been on my heart quite a bit this summer, really since Donald Trump took office in January 2017. On the surface, it seems challenging to reconcile this instruction to offer thanksgiving to God for Trump, whose tenure in the highest elected position in the United States (and perhaps the world) has been filled with so

cont'd on next page

"MANY OF TRUMP'S WHITE EVANGELICAL DEFENDERS HAVE USED A SUPERFICIAL READING OF THIS TEXT TO CONFER GOD'S SEAL OF APPROVAL ON THE PRESIDENT."

“GRAHAM HAS MADE A FAUSTIAN BARGAIN WITH A LEADER WHOSE CHARACTER AND POLICIES ARE ANTI-CHRISTIAN IN MANY WAYS.”

cont'd from previous page much amorality and cruelty to so many groups of vulnerable people that, in Matthew 25, Jesus calls us to protect. More to the point, the superficial reading of this text is what many of Trump's white evangelical defenders have attempted to weaponize in recent months to confer God's seal of approval on President Trump and imply that Trump's enemies are God's enemies.

No incident captured the blasphemy and idolatry on display from the Religious Right as well as Franklin Graham's proclamation in late May that June 2 would be a "Special Day of Prayer" for President Trump. It was not the notion in and of itself that Christians ought to pray for the president that was so deeply corrosive. Instead, it was the reasons Graham gave: "President Trump's enemies continue to try everything to destroy him, his family, and the presidency. In the history of our country, no president has been attacked as he has. I believe the only hope for him, and this nation, is God."

The problem here, as it so often is on the Right

and has been particularly evident since Trump won the Republican Party's nomination for president in 2016, is that it gets the relationship between faith and politics precisely backward. Franklin Graham and the president's other evangelical supporters are bringing their political preferences to God and asking God to bless their chosen leader with success over his political and legal adversaries. And they do this despite the abundant evidence that Trump's character and policies violate essential tenets of Jesus' ministry each and every day, including the command to love our neighbors as ourselves and the teaching that all human beings are created in God's image and likeness, to name just two. Franklin Graham and his ilk have made a Faustian bargain to support a leader whose character and policies are in many ways anti-Christ in exchange for the opportunity to wield influence in national affairs and score political "wins" for people who look like they do and who share their ideological and religious identity.

Rather than bringing politics to our faith and subordinating the tenets of our faith to our political affiliation, we are called to start with our faith—with the teachings and person of Jesus Christ—and to bring that faith into our politics to shape our political beliefs and change our politics to better reflect God's purposes for the world and for God's children. In that context, the clear meaning of Paul's instruction to Timothy is that since God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," our prayer for all those in political leadership, including President Trump, should be that they would understand and follow God's agenda, not the other way around. ✕



Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine.



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ARE WE SUFFICIENTLY TROUBLED?

Sub-Saharan Africa gives a glimpse of what climate collapse looks like.



2

This year, the seasonal rains in Kenya came two months late. “Even the weatherman can’t forecast the weather,” Stephen Katama, a local shopkeeper in Nairobi, told me when I traveled to East Africa in June. “We can’t tell the difference between the summer and winter here anymore.”

During the past two decades, rain in sub-Saharan Africa has increased in frequency and intensity, creating dangerously erratic patterns of rainfall and drought. A single day’s downpour may bring the amount of rainfall normally expected over a period of eight months, wreaking havoc on the livelihoods of countless subsistence farming families across Kenya and Uganda.

Sub-Saharan Africa is among the regions projected to see the worst of climate change in the coming decades. I traveled with the Climate Witness Project, hosted by the Christian Reformed Church in the U.S., to Nakuru, Kenya, and North Teso and Soroti, Uganda, to visit farming communities facing extreme shifts in weather patterns. We went to witness climate collapse on the frontlines.

In North Teso, I met Pentecostal pastor Emmanuel Okwalinga. Using the biblical text on the groaning of God's children (Exodus 23:23-25), Okwalinga recalled last year's drought. Farmers went to bed hungry, he said, stayed awake all night, then rose weak with hunger to cultivate their fields. Chronic drought and flood patterns lead to low crop yields, which spiral into food insecurity and poverty.

While some political leaders in the United States continue to promote climate denial, Kenya and Uganda are taking climate justice seriously. More than 40 years ago, Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement that transformed that nation's landscape by strategic tree planting. The National Council of Churches of Kenya has climate justice goals at the heart of its strategic plan, including "greening" churches and reforestation. And Kenya and Uganda are keeping their Paris Agreement promises. Today, Kenya runs on more than 70 percent renewable energy, compared to a stuttering 11 percent in the U.S.

Moreover, the methods of community climate resilience in Kenya and Uganda are hopeful and astounding. Rural farmers are implementing successful conservation agriculture principles (low tillage, intercropping, and mulching) to produce higher crop yields. In Nakuru, there is a resurgence of youth groups creating farm-based microbusinesses. In Kenya, women are more involved than men in small-scale farming. Increasing the capacity of these women enables them to feed their whole family.

In Kaberamaido, Uganda, churches host village savings-and-loan associations, through which people save money together, earning interest and giving each other loans—vital among farming communities, especially with varying climate conditions.

The per capita carbon footprint of the United States is among the largest on earth, while Kenya and Uganda together account for less than 1 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Kenyan Peter Muthengi, disaster risk reduction coordinator for Anglican Development Services, told me he wouldn't choose to be American even if he could. He'd rather have Africa's genuine wealth—natural resources included. He'd rather not live in a country that is economically and materially rich yet spiritually and ecologically impoverished. Muthengi reminded me of the privilege that enabled me to come from one of the richest, most influential countries in the world to see this. I became more aware of the structures of power and privilege that brought me to this place.

I traveled to Kenya and Uganda to be a Christian witness. Witness implies obligation.

"THE METHODS OF COMMUNITY CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN KENYA AND UGANDA ARE HOPEFUL AND ASTOUNDING."

When someone has seen firsthand something significant, they have a responsibility to tell the truth, and Jesus calls us to be messengers of truth. Here is a truth: People are really suffering—not tomorrow, but today. Their homes and farms are ravaged. They are pulled into starvation, driven into violent conflict, even resorting to suicide because of climate change.

During a worship service at Christ Church, an Anglican congregation in Nairobi, Rev. Linda Ochola-Adolwa preached that civil society is a *contested* space, not a neutral one. She challenged us to faithfully engage the places we inhabit. "Are we sufficiently troubled for the ways of our society?" she asked.

Are we sufficiently troubled enough to respond? The experiences of the most vulnerable among us, rather than the most visible or privileged, must directly inform policies in the U.S.—policies that must be compassionate, transformative, and comprehensive.

After all I have seen and heard, I cannot help but bear witness to these stories, to educate, and to act. Will you? ♦

Melody Zhang is the climate justice campaign coordinator at Sojourners.

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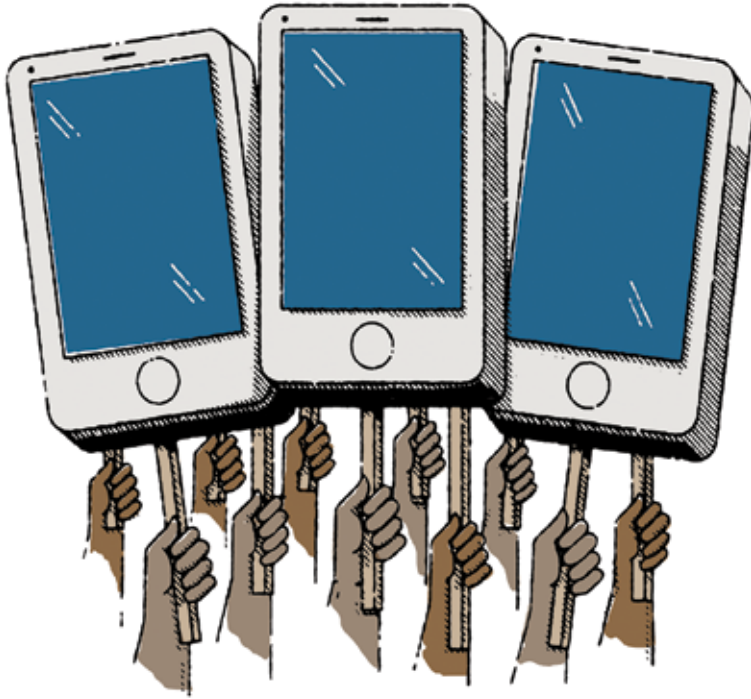


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SOJOURNERS

COMMENTARY

BY NICO PLOOIJER



A TASTE FOR FREEDOM

With no weapons but their bodies and an indomitable spirit, the people of Sudan demand civilian rule.

If you've checked your social media recently, you may have noticed profile pictures with a blue background. This is how some are showing solidarity with the peaceful demonstrators in Sudan who, in the face of extreme violence and a near-total internet blackout, are demanding a civilian government.

Last December, the Sudan Professionals Association (SPA), an umbrella organization of trade unions, organized a large demonstration in Khartoum, the nation's capital, focused on the dire economic situation in the country. The public outpouring grew as people took to the streets in more than 90 locations throughout Sudan. These new protests, triggered by price hikes and food shortages, quickly developed into anti-government protests and inspired even more actions around the country. The SPA decided to change its target: Instead of focusing on the economy, the SPA began to demand the removal of the military-led regime.

Sudan is not new to nonviolent revolutions. The Sudanese took to the streets in organized mass demonstrations and general strikes that ended dictatorships in 1964 and 1985. But they didn't always end well. In 2013, for instance, protests were met by the killing of nearly 200 people. After

this horrible event, leaders of Sudanese civil society revisited their strategies, focusing on underground organizing and training in nonviolent action and civil resistance.

The current campaign is reaping the fruits of those efforts. In early April, protesters held a sit-in at military headquarters and invited members of the armed forces to stand with the people. Many thought the action couldn't be sustained, but those betting against the people were proven wrong. The sit-in developed into a well-organized, 24/7 demonstration. All kinds of groups set up tents to highlight their issues and demands; a professional stage was donated where musical acts and political speeches took turns.

Every evening, thousands of people, including entire families with small children, visited the sit-in. It became a microcosm of what the Sudanese people crave: a place of free expression through arts, discussions, and tolerance. Not only did the sit-in provide a podium for people from neglected areas across Sudan, but it also demonstrated respect between religions. This was poignantly expressed when, during Ramadan, Christians provided shelter from the burning sun for their Muslim compatriots to pray.

On April 11, the dictator Omar al-Bashir was toppled. Unfortunately, his allies were quick to take over, forming the Transitional Military Council. However, the people recognized the council as a new version of the Bashir regime, albeit with a slight makeover. The protests continued, demanding the transition to a civilian government.

Negotiations between the protesters and the military council continued. Just before a deal was struck, Sudanese security forces attacked the peaceful demonstrators. More than 100 people were killed, women were raped, and bodies were dumped in the Nile. Tents in the sit-in area were burned; art was painted over.

In reaction, the Sudan Professionals Association called for a general strike that brought the whole country to a halt. The military council shut down the internet for several weeks.

This is a difficult moment in Sudan, but there is hope. The Sudanese people have tasted freedom and have seen the effectiveness of nonviolent action firsthand. They have stayed peaceful in the face of violent attacks. And while international bodies test various mediation efforts and power-sharing arrangements, the Sudanese continue their nonviolent protests demanding a civilian government. ✕

Nico Plooijer provides strategic support for nonviolent action through PAX in the Netherlands. See paxforpeace.nl for updates on Sudan.

COMMENTARY

BY KATHRYN POST

A

SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN

Lawsuits again pit religious freedom against LGBTQ rights.

A succession of lawsuits involving the state of Michigan, the American Civil Liberties Union, and Christian adoption agencies has again pitted religious freedom against LGBTQ rights.

In 2017, after a same-sex couple seeking to adopt was turned away by Bethany Christian Services and St. Vincent Catholic Charities, the ACLU took the couple's case to court. In March, the case was settled in favor of the LGBTQ clients. Adoption agencies that receive funds from the state of Michigan can no longer turn away LGBTQ couples or individuals because of religious objections. In response, Bethany—the largest Christian adoption and foster agency in the U.S. and headquartered in Michigan—reluctantly changed its policy in the state to allow LGBTQ couples to foster children. In contrast, St. Vincent filed a follow-up lawsuit against the state human services department.

"We are disappointed with how this settlement agreement has been implemented by the state government. Nonetheless, Bethany will continue operations in Michigan, in compliance with our legal contract requirements," a Bethany spokesperson said in a statement. "We are focused on demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ by serving children in need, and we intend to continue doing so in Michigan."

Religious freedom cases involving adoption are highly contentious. However, the weaponization of Christianity against LGBTQ people not only violates the Christian directive to love but misses the moral complexity in people's lives.

"The rhetoric is so one-sided. It creates this dichotomy where it's impossible for folks to conceive that someone who is LGBTQ could also be Christian," said Kat Bowling, a leader and activist in Atlanta's queer Christian community. "LGBTQ Christians are just as capable of raising children in healthy, nurturing faith environments as are heterosexual families," said Bowling. She believes her right to adopt should not be limited by something that has no impact on her ability to parent.

But it's complicated. In the U.S., all adop-



tion agencies must be licensed with the state—and most faith-based agencies rely on state referrals and tax dollars to keep their adoption and foster programs going. Bowling believes that if LGBTQ Americans pay taxes, then this money should not be "used against them for their own discrimination."

Jimmy Itczak, a gay Christian on staff at a Presbyterian church in Missouri, and his husband are currently raising funds for adoption. Itczak "doesn't like the idea" that Christian adoption agencies receiving govern-

ment funds can choose whether to represent LGBTQ couples, but he doesn't think these policies have impacted his family's adoption search. "As sad as it is, I'm very cynical about Christian adoption [agencies]," said Itczak. "My assumption is that they are not open to LGBT adoptions."

Why do LGBTQ couples turn to Christian adoption agencies in the first place? Kristy and Dana Dumont, the LGBTQ couple involved in the ACLU's Michigan cases, attempted to adopt from Bethany and St. Vincent because of the agencies' location and services. Though the Dumonts are not Christian, they wanted to adopt from agencies in their county so they could keep children close to their families and schools, and they wanted to adopt older children, something Bethany and St. Vincent specialize in. Christian adoption agencies are much more likely than other agencies to work with special-needs children, sibling groups, and older children.

Bowling thinks Christian LGBTQ couples may want to work with agencies that share their religious worldview. "Why wouldn't you consider institutions within your faith?" she asked. "LGBTQ folks should not be limited because of their orientation when they have the same deeply held religious beliefs that in many other ways would align with an agency."

There are more than 13,000 children in foster care in Michigan, more than 300 of whom need adoptive families. When the Michigan foster-care crisis is politicized, culture wars overshadow the children whose health and welfare must be our priority.

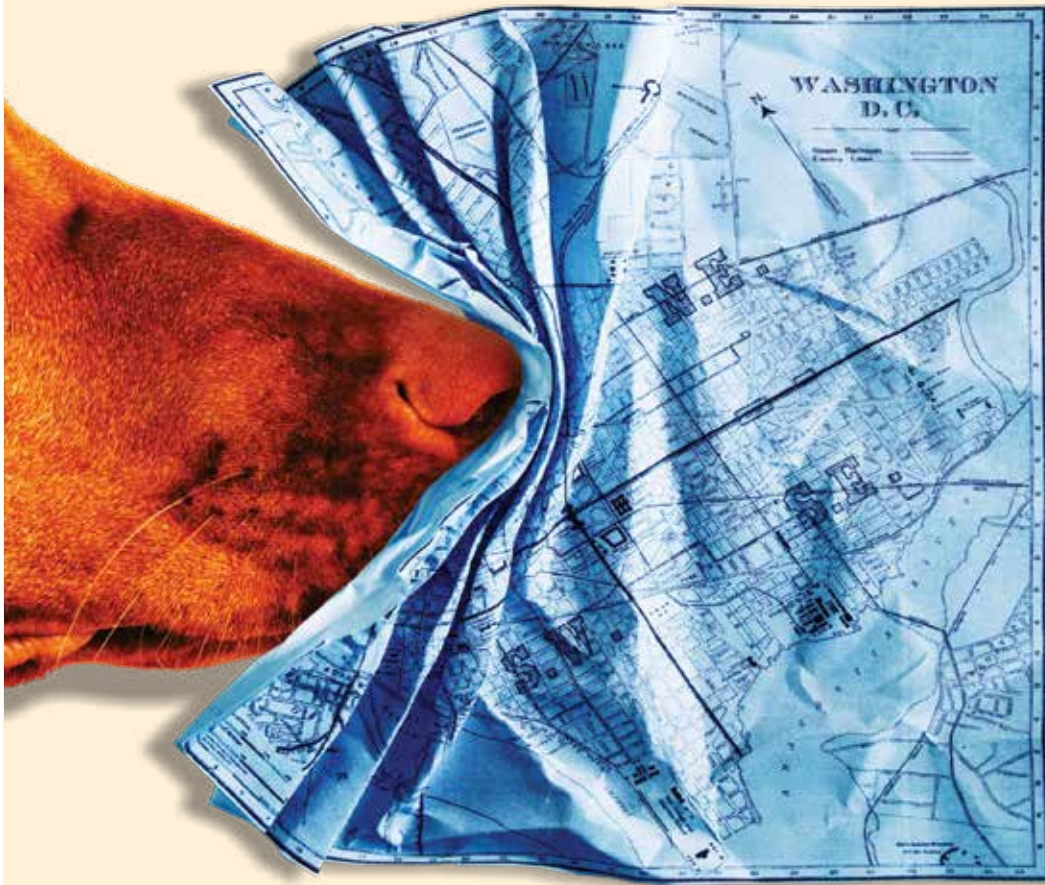
"What's important is bringing awareness to the kids in foster care," said Kristy Dumont. "It's about providing families for children." ✕

**"WE ARE FOCUSED
ON DEMONSTRATING
THE LOVE OF JESUS
CHRIST BY SERVING
CHILDREN IN NEED,
AND WE INTEND TO
CONTINUE DOING
SO."**

Kathryn Post is an editorial assistant at *Sojourners*.

RACIAL JUSTICE AND ANIMAL JUSTICE

3



Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was one of the worst environmental justice disasters in modern U.S. history. It was also one of the first times that I, then a teenager, consciously connected animal justice and racial justice. Kanye West's declaration "George Bush doesn't care about black people" is often remembered as the statement on racism in Katrina, but another expression that needed no words circulated among black people in the hurricane's immediate aftermath: a picture of pets being evacuated on an air-conditioned bus.

While black people were abandoned, dead, and dying on rooftops, corpses floating bloated in flooded streets, people's pets were evacuated to safety.

Black people have long understood as racist the disparate treatment of non-human animals and black people. In 1855, Frederick Douglass wrote that "The

**"WHILE BLACK PEOPLE WERE
DYING ON ROOFTOPS, PEOPLE'S
PETS WERE BEING EVACUATED
TO SAFETY."**

bond-woman lives as a slave, and is left to die as a beast; often with fewer attentions than are paid to a favorite horse.” One-hundred-sixty years later, Roxane Gay similarly noted the differing reactions to two 2015 killings: Cecil the Lion by an American dentist (worldwide outcry) and Samuel DuBose, a black man, by an American police officer (no such response).

As an animal lover and, at the time of Katrina, a Los Angeles Zoo student volunteer with plans to become a veterinarian, I felt the odd and emptying sense of dehumanization in seeing that picture of pets on a bus. Caring for animals was one of the most meaningful experiences in my life, one of the ways I felt most human, yet I was struck by the devaluing of black life contained in that very expression of care.

This racism carries new urgency in the age of the Anthropocene. As we finally begin to address humans’ destructive impact on the world, putting 1 million plant and animal species at risk of extinction, we must also confront how white supremacy harms black and brown people with warped, racist notions of “human being” and false, hierarchical models of creation limiting who is in the circle of care. Like on climate change, evidence abounds.

Gentrification—a quiet hurricane demolishing black communities and uprooting black lives—is often foreshadowed by white dog-walkers in Washington, D.C., the city where I live and one of the most intensely gentrifying U.S. cities. More than one clash has followed affluent, white dog owners’ attempts to change neighborhood space for the benefit of their dogs—for an egregious example, google “dog-walking, Howard University, gentrification.” Trendy cashless, plant-based eateries also distort environmentalism by including some lives (animals) and excluding others (largely black, poor people lacking access to credit).

Matthew 10:29-31 affirms that God’s eye is on sparrows and humans, with attentiveness to the former underscoring the latter. Uncoupling this interlinked care harms black people in particular ways, including an internalized racism that pits black humanity against animal welfare.

We must rethink theologies of creation and what it means to be made in the image of God, and live into this image anew. We need new ways to be human, for the benefit of all. ☒

Jeania Ree V. Moore is a United Methodist deacon who writes theological aesthetics, practices the arts, and works in faith-based social justice in Washington, D.C.

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SOJOURNERS

DEEP ECONOMY

BY BILL MCKIBBEN

CLIMATE STRIKE



S

Since last September, when Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg began her one-woman campaign, school strikes have happened around the planet. At their height in the spring, 1.4 million kids left class for a day, demanding that our leaders actually lead on the greatest crisis the planet has ever faced. In May, the students asked adults to join them, and so

on Sept. 20 the first all-ages climate strike will take place across the planet.

Here's why you should join in making it the largest day of climate protest in human history:

1) Because the climate crisis just keeps deepening.

When I wrote the first book about all this, 30 years ago this fall, scientists were issuing warnings about what would happen if we didn't act. We didn't act, and now instead of warnings we're issuing body counts. Wildfire, flood, the spread of insects carrying disease: The iron law of climate change is that it affects first those who have done the least to cause it. But by now it's reaching every part of the planet: Last autumn in California, we watched a city literally called Paradise almost literally turn into hell inside half an hour.

"IT'S NOT OKAY TO MAKE NINTH-GRADERS SAVE THE PLANET BY THEMSELVES."

This spring, we watched the relentless flooding across the richest grain belt of the planet.

2) Without rapid, transformative action, it's going to get much worse.

So far, we've raised the temperature of the planet 1 degree Celsius—about 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit. But we're on course, unless something changes fast, to see it rise 3.5 degrees Celsius—6 degrees Fahrenheit—by century's end. Scientists say that would preclude civilization as we've known it.

3) We could change if we got our act together.

Engineers have worked small miracles—the price of solar power has dropped almost 90 percent in the last decade. So, if our governments and financial institutions put their mind to it, rapid change is truly possible (and it would save us vast amounts of money that would otherwise be spent trying to defend against cataclysm).

4) There's a big movement demanding change—but it needs to get much bigger.

Right now, leadership is coming from front-line communities most affected by change. It's coming from Indigenous communities around the planet. It's coming from scientists and from people of faith. But it needs to come from everyone! This is the defining issue of our lifetimes—you need to not just worry about it, but to get out in the street.

5) A strike—if only for a day—is the perfect way to do it.

We have to show that we're willing to disrupt business as usual. Right now, despite the unfolding crisis, we mostly just get up in the morning and do what we did the day before—business as usual is literally what's killing us.

6) It's not okay to make ninth-graders save the planet by themselves.

So, go to globalclimateshrike.net and make yourself an organizer for a day. It's not hard, and you'll sleep better. ✖

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, is the author most recently of *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* (April 2019).



ACTIVISM IN A TIME OF PERPETUAL WAR

America seems to be in a perpetual state of war. We've militarized our borders and violently separated children from their families. We are inundated with horrifying images, such as that of the father and daughter who lost their lives to the Rio Grande.

I am not from the border, but the border runs through me.

War is not new. Its effects are felt from generation to generation, a collective trauma from our ancestors to our living bodies. War lingers on the land and in our bones. We have a responsibility to speak out against destruction and to rise to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. It is clearly a time for spiritual activism.

Some churches have fallen short in speaking out. They have fallen short in meeting the needs of God's children.

**"I AM NOT FROM THE
BORDER, BUT THE
BORDER RUNS
THROUGH ME."**

Following Jesus in times of humanitarian crisis is difficult; it requires us to come fully into awareness about the harm we, as a nation, have caused and about our complacency, and complicity, in that harm against one another. And it can compel us to consider breaking the unjust laws that are causing the harm.

Many churches, on the other hand—often those who seem to have the least resources—have risen to the occasion, offering what little they have (from providing translators at bus stations to offering support and sanctuary) to those in need at the southern border. Is it enough?

Many people feel hopeless. They think, "What can I possibly do?" Many say that prayers are not enough—that's true; prayers alone will not heal the deep wounds in our nation and across the globe. But prayers are a start; there is hope in prayer.

Each of our humanitarian crises holds a mirror to who we all are. The southern border crisis is only one of many mirrors that asks us to face ourselves. While we can blame governments and blame unjust laws and loopholes, we truly have to face ourselves as active participants in creating our government and in creating room for loopholes. We did this.

Now what? Sit with the "we did this" portion and begin to make active and real change in our spirits and in our homes. There is room for every kind of activist to change structures of power; that includes spiritual activists who draw on and are guided by the Holy Spirit.

We seem to be in a perpetual state of war—with ourselves. We are re-creating trauma for every generation. War lingers because we allow it. America seems to be only able to view these humanitarian crises from a Western lens. We have to take off the lens of Western thinking and begin to look inward. This is the moment to find what makes you a spiritual activist for the healing of the kin-dom. ✕

Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros is a Tejana, Chicana, and Mujerista from San Antonio, where she is a graduate student at Our Lady of the Lake University. She is the 2019 recipient of the Rubem Alves Award in Theopoetics.

EYEWITNESS

4



“WHEN 6 O’CLOCK
COMES, IT’S LIKE
CINDERELLA: YOU
HAVE TO GO BACK.”

THE DAY THE BORDER DISAPPEARS

"For me it's like a family reunion. Because before the border between Pasos Lajitas, Mexico, and Lajitas, Texas, was closed, it was like a big family. Everybody knew each other; some people worked in the United States and lived in Mexico. They came back and forth without anybody stopping them to make sure they had documents.

But after 9/11, in May 2002, the border was suddenly closed and people got separated. So the community decided that we should have a family reunion every year on that date.

When we arrive, we put up a little shade. For me, I cannot cross to Mexico, but my *familia* does, my Mexican family does cross over. And what we do is we eat, we talk with our families, hug—just have fun with them. We catch up with how their life is going because we haven't seen each other for a year. And we cook and share our food.

At the beginning, the priest stands in the river and he blesses everybody from this side and from that side. I think it's a symbol of peace. We're not here to fight; we're all brothers and sisters.

It's like a picnic and we stay there all day until 6, which is the hour we have to pick up everything. When 6 o'clock comes, it's like Cinderella: You have to go back. The people who crossed from Mexico go back to Mexico and the people who are from here pick up everything and we go home. And we don't do it again until next year." ❖

The author is a Mexican woman living in the U.S. who wishes to remain anonymous. She spoke with *Sojourners* associate editor Betsy Shirley about the 2019 Voices From Both Sides festival, which takes place every year in the Rio Grande between Pasos Lajitas, Mexico, and Lajitas, Texas.





ICE

KEEP OUT!



**NO
TRESPASSING**



No trespassing

**POLICE
ICE**

HOW

**Step one:
Name names**

TO LOVE

By *Melissa Florer-Bixler*

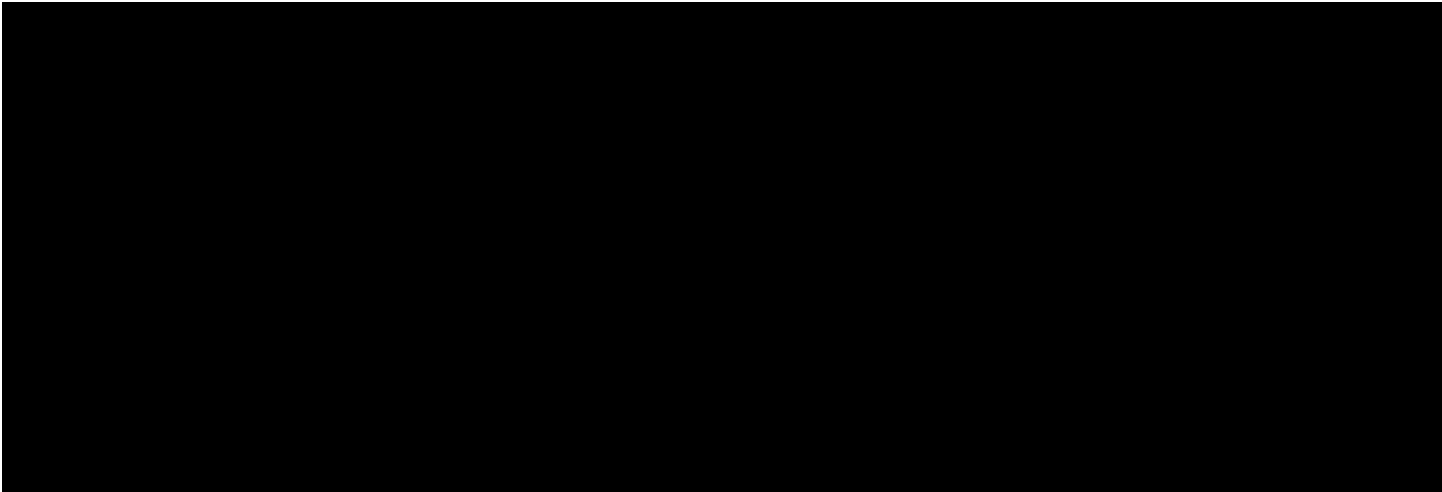
YOUR

Illustrations by *Tim McDonagh*

ENEMY

Sept/Oct 2019 / 23

**I HAVE NEVER
ROBERT ALFIE
BUT HE IS MY**



MET RI,

Alfieri is acting assistant field office director for Immigration and Customs Enforcement in my part of North Carolina. For Alfieri, it's a job. He believes he keeps people like me safe from violent criminals. But in the time that Alfieri has overseen ICE in our area, hundreds of people, mostly Latinx community members, have been disappeared at traffic stops and picked up during raids at their workplaces. At our local elementary school, children wait in administrators' offices for a parent who will never show up. Birthday parties and baptisms are tinged with anxiety and sadness as communities contemplate the forced separation from those they love. Families scramble to make ends meet when a primary breadwinner is kidnapped at work.

In a recent round of ICE raids in Durham, a young father was picked up while packing his car for work, collateral damage among the targets set by ICE. In a nearby NICU his premature infant—born at seven months—waited alone. Maria, the baby's mother, recovered from surgery while her spouse sat in a detention center, hoping our community could raise the \$15,000 bond set by a judge. Eventually they raised \$7,000, securing the rest through a loan. ICE officials "don't have a heart," Maria told a local reporter.

This young father, the main wage earner for his family, was in ICE detention for many reasons, including xenophobic immigration policies, decades of U.S. interventionist politics in Central America, the mythic war on drugs, and the complicity of the American public in fictive safe-keeping from their undocumented neighbors. But he was also in ICE detention, separated from his family, because of Robert Alfieri.

AN UNSUNG DISCIPLINE

When someone shares with me that they have an enemy, it is often in pastoral confidence, whispered as a confession. Having an enemy, they intuit, is a botched form of discipleship resulting from failed reconciliation. The language of enemies is seen as the end of a conversation—or the end of relationship.

We assume everyone is doing their best, or failing on some things but not everything, or that people are cogs in a complex machine over which they have little control. We let systemic oppression be the problem. When we see others hurt, when we encounter people enacting terror on their neighbors, we assume they are simply misguided.

Yet Christians follow scriptures in which enemies are named with clarity and vigor. The third chapter of Luke begins by naming the names of the tormentors of the Jews of the first century: Emperor Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, and Herod. Right up front we

ENEMY.

are introduced to the full swath of political actors who oppress and terrorize the common people of Judea.

Tiberius was the emperor known for his extreme paranoia and wrath that spread like a disease across his territories. Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judea, executed political enemies without trial and was infamous for his bribes and insults. Herod Antipas imprisoned and executed his enemies over personal slights.

Luke sets the scene for the gospel in a tyrannical, volatile, and oppressive political climate. And he wants us to know who is in charge, who makes this repression possible. He doesn't reduce the problem to "good people who do bad things." He doesn't blame systems. He names enemies.

Rightly having enemies is an unsung discipline of the Christian life. More often than not we abandon the task before we get started; we wrongly assume we should not have enemies. But the expectation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that we *will* have enemies. We know this because Jesus gives us a command to love our enemies. And in order to love your enemies, you first have to know who they are.

HELD UP BY PEOPLE

Often people outside the church tell me how they are drawn to Jesus, meek and mild. This caricature misses out on the actual Jesus of the Bible, who lashes out against the religious teachers whom he calls false prophets, blind guides, whitewashed tombs, and hypocrites.

Those stories of Jesus lounging with children and lambs leave out that in the next breath Jesus told onlookers that it was better to tie stones around their necks and throw themselves into the sea than deliberately bar the way for children who want to come to him. They leave out that Jesus' anger drove the money changers from the temple with a whip.

This Jesus teaches us that there are right and wrong ways to have enemies. When we look at Jesus' life we see that enmity is born when we recognize that the structures of terror and injustice are held up *by people*.

Oppression is enacted by individual human beings, who collectively wash their hands of the matter. Without the participation of people—individuals doing the work—these systems would collapse.

Without Robert Alfieri directing ICE agents into our community, taking a salary to destroy families, and showing up every day to an office that determines if children will live isolated from a parent, a grandmother, a sibling, an uncle—the system could not sustain itself.

Robert Alfieri is my enemy, but not because we disagree. Enemies are not the people we dislike or those who are different from us. In the gospel, enemies are those who make camp on the far side of the line that is justice. And God is beckoning us—*all* of us—to join God among the oppressed.

RIGHTLY HAVING ENEMIES IS AN UNSUNG DISCIPLINE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.



ARMED WITH LOVE

In this way Jesus reorients our way of having enemies. We do not arm ourselves with weapons to coerce or threaten enemies of God's liberation into submission. Instead we create the world we want. In Durham this means creating a fund to support families like Maria and her baby in the NICU. It means that strangers sign up for shifts to check on reports of ICE activity in the area. The world we create is one in which religious communities open their doors for temporary sanctuary if a person without papers is afraid to go home. It means we check on our neighbors in ways we did not before. We carve out a life of community amid the terror. It is a life of joy amid destruction. And it is the life into which we invite our enemies.

But this begins with first having enemies. It's easy to observe the complexities of human life and psychology, of nature vs. nurture, and throw up our hands, assuming things are the best they can be. Or we can do the careful work of putting ourselves in spaces to hear from those who experience oppression and making their enemies our own, an act of solidarity as we rightly name the world. That won't untangle the messiness, but it will change the way we think about friends and enemies.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

In December 2018, Jakelin Caal Maquin died in El Paso, Texas, 2,000 miles from the home she fled in Guatemala. She and her father were detained at a remote border crossing in New Mexico. We have yet to see anyone take responsibility for her death. Instead, individuals and agencies wash their hands of Jakelin's death.

But there are many individuals who contributed to Jakelin's death. Doris Meissner is the enemy of Jakelin. She is the commissioner who signed off on the 1994 plan to strategically push migrants into remote parts of the desert, making the desert a weapon.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower is responsible for Jakelin's death. He oversaw the 1954 coup d'état in Guatemala orchestrated by the U.S. to overthrow the democratically elected president and install a puppet administration.

The architects of the Central America Free Trade Agreement that decimated the Guatemalan economy are responsible for Jakelin's death.

White House staffer Stephen Miller is responsible for Jakelin's death, by whipping up anti-immigration sentiment in the U.S.

The border guards who refused to respond to her father's cries for help are responsible for Jakelin's death.

Because these were Jakelin's enemies, they become my enemies: my life for her life, my tears for her, my work in the world in her

honor—for the life she should have lived.

We cannot hope to be called out of enmity, to call others out of enmity, until we are ready to do the work of seeing rightly, of making Jakelin's enemies our own. We cannot be former enemies until we first name our enmity, both that we have enemies and that we have been the enemies of others. This is why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in post-apartheid South Africa began with confession. There could be no hope for forgiveness unless enemies were named first.

To love your enemies is to call them out of the world of denial and oppression, of despots and executioners. To love your enemies is to help them see the truth about themselves and show them something else is possible. To love your enemies is to tell them the story of how once we too were enemies of God and that through the love of God who lived, died, and rose among us, we are now called friends. We have enemies because we hope that one day we might call them friends.

There is nothing emotional or psychological about this change. To turn from enemies to friends means our lives must change. And sometimes this means our jobs, how we make money, how we act in the world must change. If we are serious about making our enemies into friends, committed to loving them well, our churches will begin to mobilize to help people leave their jobs with ICE. For decades peace churches such as the Quakers and Mennonites organized efforts to help people leave or avoid military careers. The American Friends Service Committee provides resources for counter-recruitment among economically vulnerable people who find very little career opportunity outside the military. Mennonites and Quakers offer advising on "alternative service" to provide pathways to careers outside the military.

If the church is serious about loving our enemies, we'll apply this same form of organizing to people recruited for the jobs of kidnapping and deportation for ICE. We'll commit resources to job transition, loan repayment, and community support. We'll stand outside ICE recruitment offices just as Quakers and Mennonites stand outside military recruitment offices. We'll mobilize to offer job retraining and placement for former ICE agents. And we'll do this because we know that the work to destroy our community is a wound on the soul of those who enact oppression just as it is for those who are its victims.

If Robert Alfieri, my enemy, is ready to leave behind the work of destruction, I am waiting here to help him along the way. ♦

Melissa Florer-Bixler is the pastor of Raleigh Mennonite Church in North Carolina and the author of *Fire by Night: Finding God in the Pages of the Old Testament* (Herald Press, April 2019).

**I N B R A Z I L , C H R I S T I A N F E M I N I S T S W O R K
L E N C E E V E N A S C H U R C H A N D S T A T E T A K E**

28

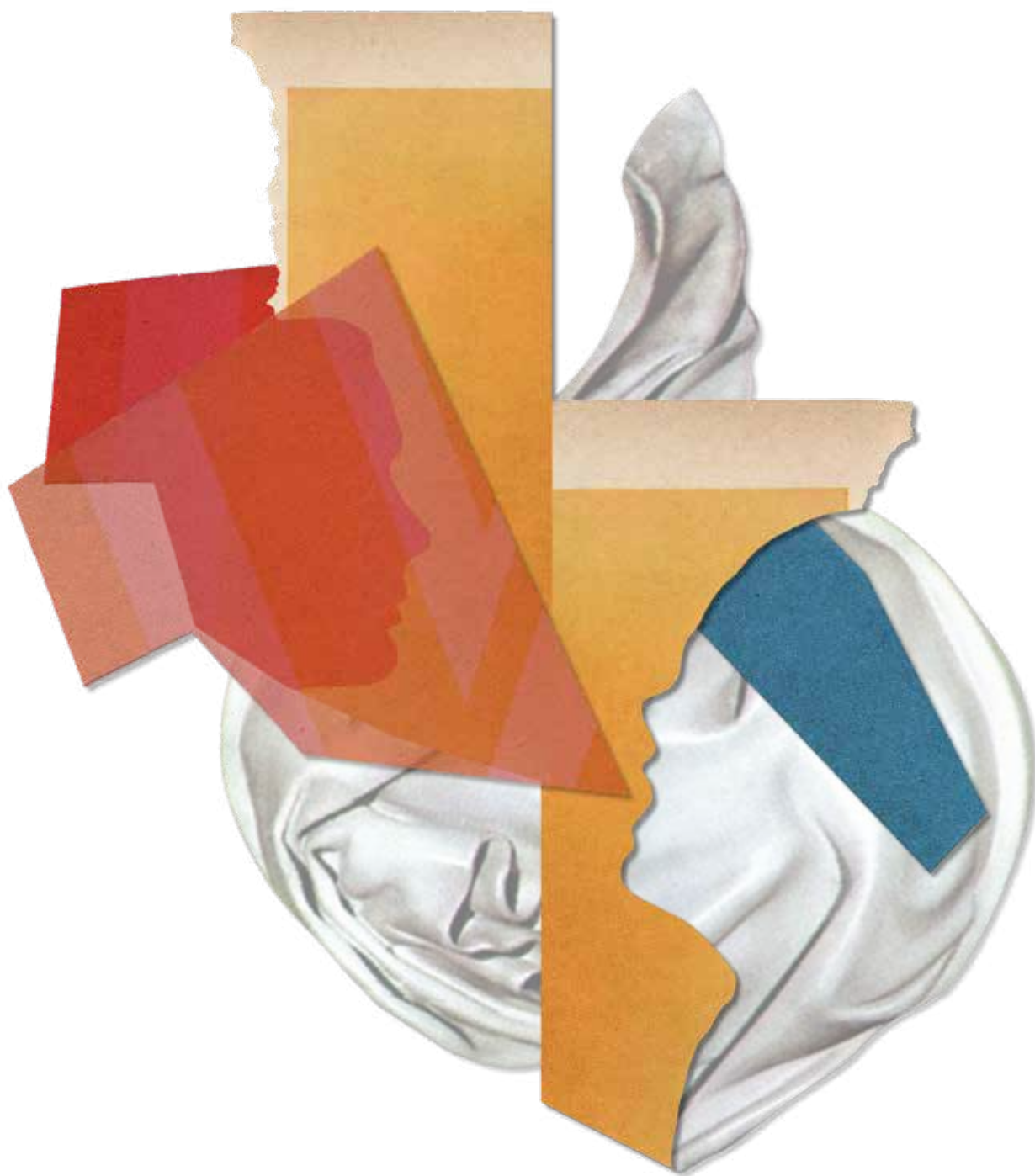
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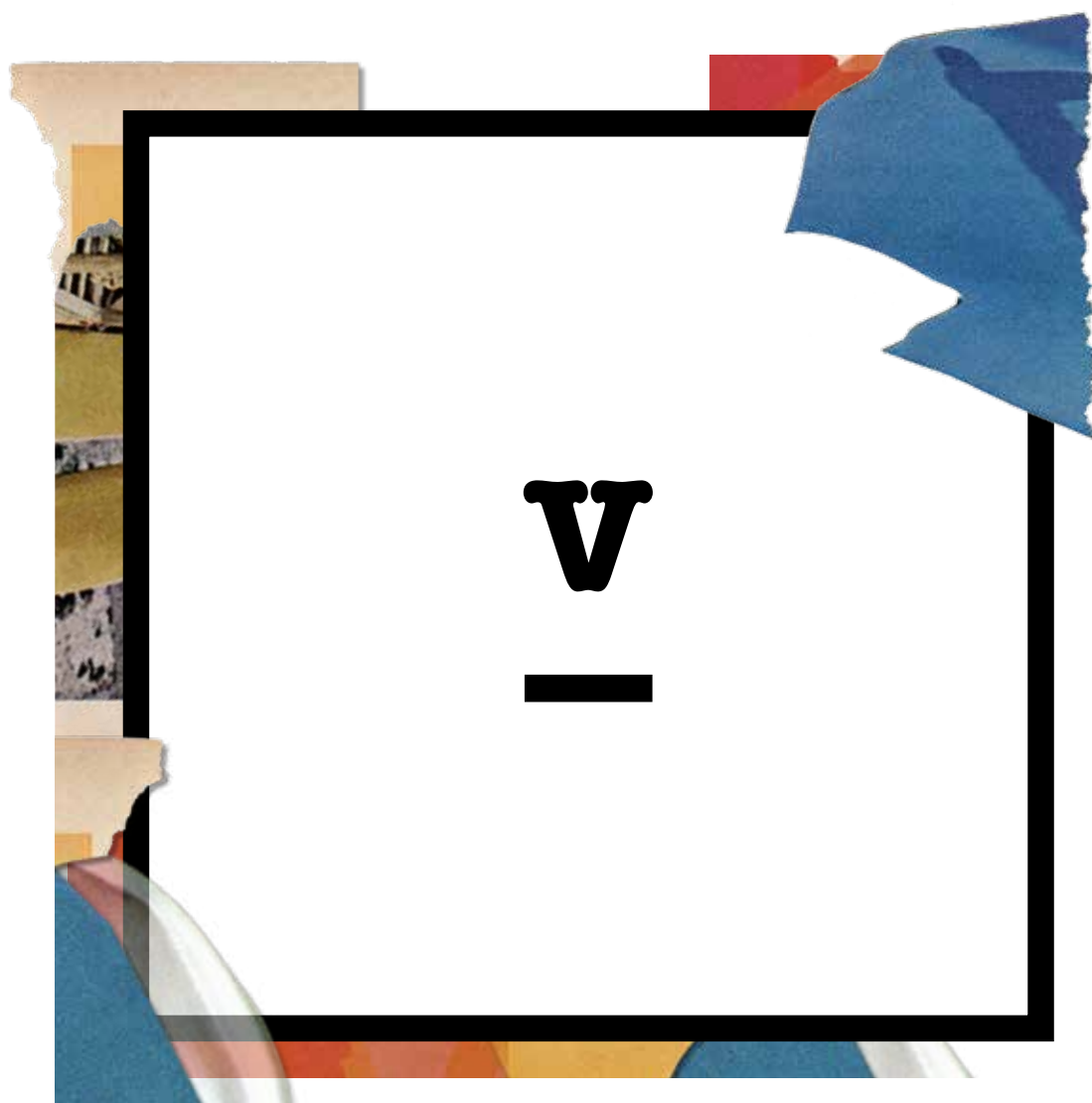


TO END ABUSE AND GENDER-BASED VIO-
A SHARP RIGHT TURN. BY ZOE SULLIVAN.

Illustration by Lisa Ryan

Sept/Oct 2019





Vitoria thought it was strange when her church's youth-group leader asked her if he could come to her house to talk about upcoming plans for the group. Vitoria, 18 at the time, had been active in First Baptist Church of Rio Doce in Olinda, Brazil. Recently, though, she had been attending youth services at a friend's nearby church.

The youth-group leader arrived at Vitoria's home and asked to use the bathroom. When he came out, she said, he held out his cell phone to show her something. "When he came in and was going to show me the plans, he reached around my back and tried to unclasp my bra," Vitoria said.

Vitoria asked him what he was doing. Then, she said, he dragged her into her bedroom and raped her.

**"HERE IN BRAZIL, THE
MOVEMENT HAS GONE IN THE
OPPOSITE DIRECTION"**

While Brazil's Carnival celebrations are famous for their libidinous nature, less well known are the expectations that women in the country "stay in their place." Pressure on women to dress modestly and comply with traditional gender roles has ratcheted up as conservative evangelical churches have

drawn millions of new members, growing from less than 10 percent of the population in 1970 to 27 percent now.

"Brazilian culture is asymmetrical when it comes to gender," said Robson Souza of the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation in Recife, one of the largest cities in northeastern Brazil. "The Brazilian evangelical ethos adapts itself to Brazil's reality in terms of double standards of morality and positioning women in a certain place," said Souza, who conducts research on evangelical women in Brazil.

This was not always the case. When the country emerged from more than two decades of dictatorship in the mid-1980s, Souza

said, Protestant churches accepted women's leadership. While mainline Protestant churches in the U.S. and Europe have become more open to women being ordained and leading congregations, according to Souza, "Here in Brazil, the movement has gone in the opposite direction."

However, Souza said, this retreat doesn't only affect women. "From a religious perspective, this more conservative, asymmetrical, unequal Brazilian ethos ends up accompanying not just gender, but also racial and ethnic relations and other spaces."

Fabio Py, a researcher at the State University of Northern Rio de Janeiro, says this intolerance is being translated into a larger socio-political framework he calls "Christo-fascism." The concept of Christo-fascism was developed by German theologian Dorothee Sölle to explain why Germany's churches supported the rise of the Nazi regime. "They take on positions against minorities, and they have a plan aimed at taking power, total power," Py said. "To this end, in the name of Christ, they endorse virulent practices against other social actors." He describes the trend as one that has developed over time through the efforts of evangelicals and Catholics in favor of "traditional family values." But he underlines that it is the action of the government against certain groups that characterizes Christo-fascism. "Now this is happening in Brazil," he said in a phone interview.

Py has studied how internet memes offer one vehicle for spreading a Christo-fascist vision. For example, one meme that appeared in the run-up to Brazil's 2018 election was a photo of then-presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro in his hospital bed after being stabbed. In a clear allusion to Christ's martyrdom, the meme's caption read: "He bled for us. Can he count on your repayment on October 7?" Bolsonaro won the presidency in October 2018.

Brazilian women, and others, worry what will happen to their rights now that Bolsonaro occupies the highest office in the land. With his denigration of LGBTQ people, Afro-Brazilians, Indigenous people, and women, Bolsonaro's rhetoric contributed, according to Py, to dozens of attacks by his supporters in the weeks surrounding the elections.

#METOO, #CHURCHTOO

After the attack by the youth-group leader, Vitoria told her best friend. A week later, she also told her mother.

Vitoria says her mother spoke with the pastor of the youth leader's church shortly after learning about the alleged rape. Vitoria and the pastor, Josemar Gonçalves, 54, have different accounts of what happened next. Gonçalves says he removed the accused assailant from his church duties immediately. Vitoria says he didn't. "After various other sisters [in the church] came together and, so to speak, put his back against the wall, telling

BOLSONARO'S RHETORIC AGAINST LGBTQ PEOPLE, AFRO-BRAZILIANS, AND WOMEN HAS CONTRIBUTED TO DOZENS OF ATTACKS BY HIS SUPPORTERS.

him that he had to do this—that was when he decided to remove [the alleged assailant]."

Two other young women came forward to report assaults by the same man. Henriqueta de Belí, the prosecutor handling Vitoria's case, said that Gonçalves had tried to resolve the other cases without involving authorities. Gonçalves denied knowledge of these reports. The accused's attorney declined to comment on the case.

Not long after the case became public, Vitoria stopped attending the church. "I had to stop going because some people believed that I was who should be expelled from the church," she said. She described church members leaving local shops when she walked in and supporters of the alleged assailant glaring at her. Shortly after the assault, Vitoria went to the church, only to have the youth-group leader walk in and sit facing her. Vitoria said he glared at her in a threatening posture.

"I'M A CHRISTIAN FEMINIST, AND I BELIEVE IN THE BIBLE"

Conservative Christians have become a powerful cultural force in Brazil. The trend is visible in everything from the box-office success of a biopic about one of Brazil's most powerful evangelical preachers, Edir Macedo, to the rise of shops that offer "modest" women's clothing such as knee-length skirts and high-necked shirts.

Many Brazilians attribute attitudes demanding women's modesty and chastity to Protestant churches, commonly called "evangelical" in Brazil. In reality, the idea of women as chattel permeates society. Valéria Vilhena, co-founder of Evangelicals for Gender

“WE SHOW UP AS WOMEN WHO SUPPORT OTHER WOMEN, AND THAT SCARES THE LEADERSHIP A BIT.”

Equality, conducted her master's research on domestic violence among Protestant households. She said that the patriarchal system “organizes society, while religious discourse makes [that system] ‘sacred.’” The result, she said, is a self-reinforcing mechanism of female subordination.

Vozes Marias (Mary's Voices) is one of several feminist Christian groups in Brazil organizing as a counterpoint to the wave of conservatism washing over the country.

“I was always certain that Christ was the savior,” said Erica Farias, a Vozes Marias member, “and I still am.” Farias left her congregation after seeing how women and girls in her church who got pregnant were ostracized while their male partners continued as if nothing had happened. These experiences led her to Vozes Marias, which questions the social norms behind such hypocrisy and offers support to the women affected.

“This system really is oppressive,” Farias said. “It damages women's spiritual subjectivity, the subjectivity of her femininity. ... There are many church systems that have destroyed women alive.”

When Vozes Marias offers a feminist interpretation of the Bible, Farias said, it's an interpretation that most people didn't know existed and can be a way to maintain faith in Christ. “I believe that we are revolutionary, in the sense that when I say that I'm a Christian feminist, and I believe in the Bible, [they say] What? How can you do that?”

Helivete Ribeiro is a Baptist minister in a mixed-income community near the historic center of Olinda. One of the founding members of Vozes Marias, Ribeiro brings her experience as a theologian to the group, which works to support women experiencing

violence. Women contact the group through an informal network, although Vozes Marias also conducts workshops in churches and elsewhere on domestic violence and other issues.

“We're often seen in a bad light because we show up as women who support other women, and we say that we are evangelical feminists,” Ribeiro said, “and that ends up scaring the leadership a bit.” Nonetheless the group has made progress. “We aren't able to harvest the fruits immediately, but we know that we have a lot of friends.”

CROSSING THE RUBICON

When Vitoria's father learned about the rape three months after the fact, he took Vitoria, his only child, to the police to report it. Although a handful of women from the congregation stood with her, she said filing the report was like crossing the Rubicon. Sometime after filing the police report, Vitoria connected with Vozes Marias. Their first meeting was in a member's nearby home.

Members of Vozes Marias were present for the initial hearing when the accused brought a team of 10 attorneys, each of whom would have been able to interrogate Vitoria. Prosecutor de Beli petitioned the judge to adjourn the session, and Vitoria later gave her deposition in a more private setting.

Although Vozes Marias works in the background to avoid exposing vulnerable women to more violence from abusive partners, the group used a different strategy with Vitoria. As Vitoria and de Beli contended with the accused's attorneys inside the courtroom, Vozes Marias convened dozens of women to protest outside the courthouse. Playing drums, the women chanted slogans such as “For the Lord, for justice, for an end to sexist behavior.” Local TV and newspapers reported on the protest.

For Vitoria, Vozes Marias' support buoyed her spirits at a critical juncture. “It's like a race, and if I tripped, they were there cheering for me, like a team,” she said.

“DOES PROVOCATIVE CLOTHING CONTRIBUTE TO RAPE?”

On a clear Sunday morning, Nadiedja Souza conducts a workshop in a Baptist church in a middle-class neighborhood in Recife. Pivoting fans perch near the top of tall, vertical beams along both sides of the church, tempering the heavy, tropical heat.

Souza represents the Baptist Convention of Pernambuco, and for 10 years she has led similar workshops in congregations around the state to raise awareness of rape culture. During the heart of the workshop, Nadiedja Souza breaks the congregation into small groups. Each group has a question to discuss, such as: Does a woman in provocative clothing contribute to her rape? Is the Maria da Penha law (Brazil's domestic violence leg-

isolation) aimed at punishing men? What role should the church play, if any, in eliminating gender-based violence?

According to data from Pernambuco's secretary of social defense, in 2018 women filed more than 39,000 reports of domestic violence and more than 300 women were murdered. The agency says less than a third of these were femicides—that is, murders committed because of the victim's gender. Gender-justice advocates, however, question the criteria used to classify the killings.

After Nadiedja Souza's workshop, it's clear that while some find the content il-

luminating, others walk out with less than a change of heart. Gilson Tenorio is one of the latter. Tenorio, in his mid-40s, is pastor of the church that hosted the workshop. As the church's band practices in the sanctuary, we sit in his office and discuss violence against women.

"Feminism, just like machismo, is an attempt to show that there is a competition between men and women, and that one is better than the other," he said. "We live in a society in which men have always been in charge, and now feminism wants women to be in charge." I suggest that feminism is actually about women being able to live their lives as they desire and to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men, but Tenorio insists that "feminism, like machismo, are sins against God."

When I ask his thoughts on Vitoria's case, he says that while the case is still being decided by the justice system, the accused raped her to "correct" her homosexuality. Vitoria is not gay. Vitoria recalls that her attacker said "that [the rape] was to see if I liked boys or girls."

LIVING THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

Race and class exacerbate the challenges facing women in the struggle for equality in Brazil, which imported 5 million slaves, more than any other country in the world. Recife, which grew on the profits from surrounding sugar plantations, is a living testament to that era.

Black workers continue to toil under the tropical sun on sugar cane plantations that hug the Recife metropolitan area. The city also embodies colonialism's economic inequality as a small white elite continues to dominate the majority-black city.

For Lillian Conceição da Silva, a Recife native and Anglican minister, churches perpetuate these racial, class, and gender hierarchies. Da Silva, who is black, holds a doctorate in theology. Her doctoral thesis focused on church-based efforts to address violence against black women.

"There is an ongoing attempt, which is centuries old, to hypersexualize black women's bodies and to render them banal," da Silva said. "Anyone can touch [those bodies]; anyone can appropriate [them], and, certainly, that helps to understand how violence against black women is normalized. It's no coincidence that black women are the main victims of femicide in Brazil."

Vitoria identifies as Afro-Brazilian. So do Nadiedja Souza, Erica Farias, and Helivete Ribeiro. Murders of women increased more than 30 percent between 2007 and 2017, according to the 2019 Atlas of Violence, published by Brazil's Economic Statistics Agency and the Brazilian Forum on Public Security. There is a striking disparity between the murder rate of black women, which rose by

29.9 percent during this period, and that of women who are not black, which increased by less than 2 percent.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Vitoria says the rape transformed her. "It opened my eyes," she explained. "If I had known of another case before this happened, I wouldn't have believed it. I realized that I had to talk about this so that what happened to me wouldn't happen to other people." The experience also changed the way she looked at her church. "This happens to other women, but they are often silenced so that someone with power in the church isn't hurt."

Between 2014 and 2018, government spending on policies to prevent violence against women and promote women's autonomy was slashed by 62 percent, from more than \$40 million to less than \$15 million, according to Brazil's Institute of Socio-Economic Studies.

The women of Vozes Marias worry how women will be further affected by the reactionary agenda of President Bolsonaro. In spite of this, Vitoria has a trajectory mapped out for herself.

"In five years, I see myself helping other people," she said. "I see myself having graduated from college. I want to help society, especially women victims of violence. And I don't want to live here anymore. Not because here isn't good for me, but because this situation feels like something that's going to mark it forever." ♦

Zoe Sullivan is a multimedia journalist in Brazil focused on gender and social equity.

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Tales From The Cooking Pot

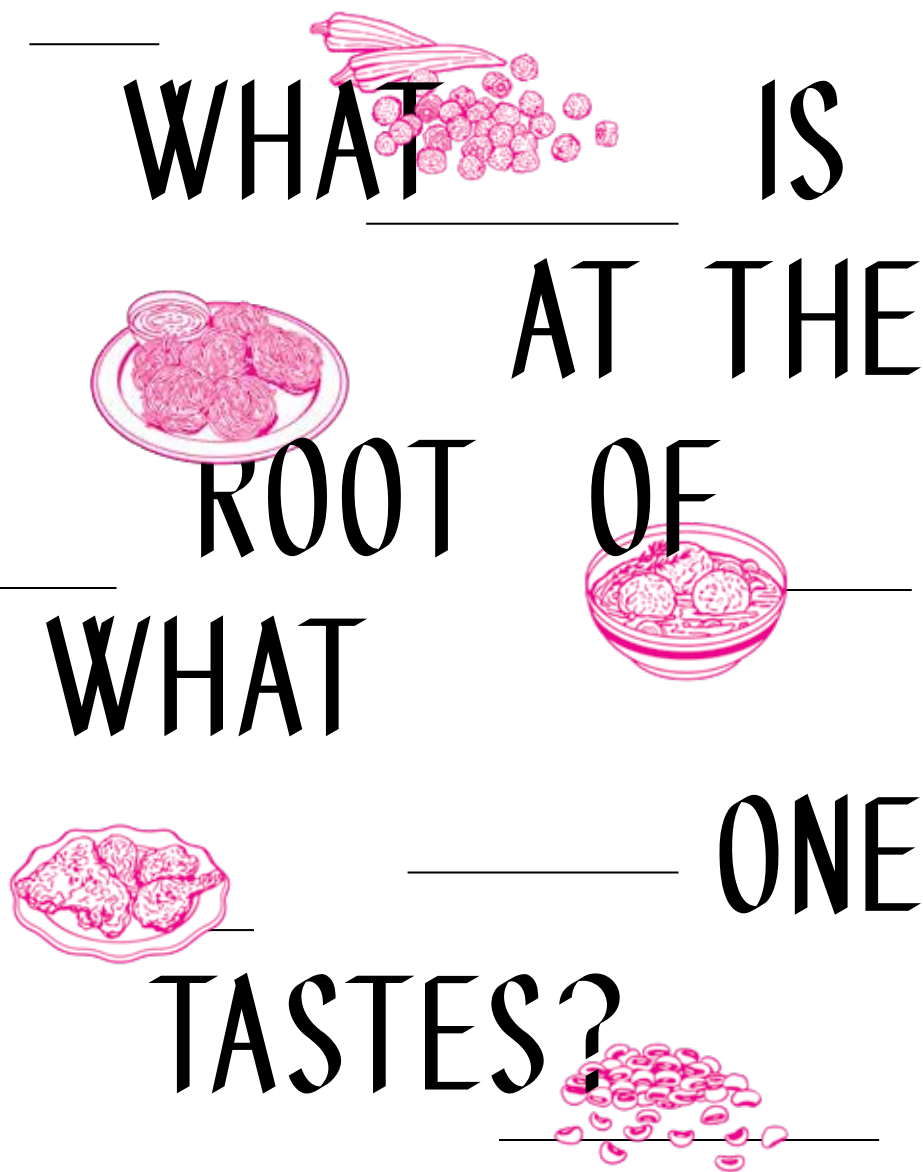


Photograph by Bret Hartman



EATING OUR WAY
ACROSS THE DIASPORAS.
AN INTERVIEW WITH **By E. Ethelbert Miller** MICHAEL W. TWITTY,
AUTHOR OF THE COOKING GENE.

WHAT IS AT THE ROOT OF WHAT ONE TASTES?



This is not an Alex Haley-like koan, but rather a historical and spiritual question. ¶ Early in my career as a writer, I met Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor, author of *Vibration Cooking* or, *The Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*. When she lived in Washington, D.C., we met on occasion at the local Safeway supermarket. Smart-Grosvenor was an American culinary anthropologist—and a food writer with a wonderful sense of humor. ¶ Culinary historian Michael Twitty’s *The Cooking Gene* falls in the lineage of Smart-Grosvenor and maybe even the work of novelist and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston. ¶ I first met Twitty years ago at Howard University in D.C. He was usually sitting in the main office of the African-American studies department in conversation with the secretary, Joyce Rose. One day I became aware of a change in his dress. Twitty may have been the only black person on Howard’s campus wearing a yarmulke.

Being black and Jewish is not new but remains intriguing. Howard is a place that prides itself on attracting a large number of students from Africa and the Caribbean. It upholds the tradition of advocating racial integration as well as the tenets of black nationalism. It’s an institution that can enhance one’s understanding of the various factors that define the black experience. Twitty’s growth and transformation made me think of Carolivia Herron, author of *Always an Olivia*, in which she traces her own lineage to Sephardic Jews who found refuge on the Georgia coast in a community of descendants of enslaved Africans.

There are many shared traditions and alliances between blacks and Jews; there is also at times much controversy. But the differences are minor when contrasted with the work blacks and Jews continue to do together in defending civil and human rights in our society.

Since my departure from Howard, I’ve followed Twitty’s career as a culinary and cultural historian. His work is a study of the role food plays in defining community and strengthening families.

The Cooking Gene, 2018 winner of the James Beard Award, should be placed on a bookshelf next to Tom Dent’s *Southern Journey: A Return to the Civil Rights Movement*. Twitty’s memoir traces his ancestry through food, from Africa to America and slavery to freedom. Each chapter includes recipes for the hungry, stirred with intellectual nourishment.

“The Old South is where I cook,” writes Twitty. “The Old South is a place where food tells me who I am. ... The Old South is where the story of our food might just tell America where it’s going.” His tales from the cooking pot should be shared with anyone who wishes to dine at the communal table. The words here are just an appetizer. There is more in the pot ready to be served.

E. Ethelbert Miller: What was it like being black and Jewish at a historical African-American school such as Howard University?

Michael W. Twitty: During my main time at Howard, I was just beginning to explore Jewish cultural politics and history via two courses jointly taught between American University and Howard. I was very fortunate to have that experience.

At age 7, you told your mother you were Jewish. Changing one’s faith is not always easy. What was the response from your family when you decided to embrace Judaism? Not much. My maternal family was really nondenominational. I never got the feeling anyone cared much. At age 7, my mom scared the hell out of me by promising I would be taken away for an impromptu bris. She didn’t have time for my whims. But I officially became Jewish in my 20s.

The Cooking Gene was published in 2017. Since that time you've quickly developed a public persona. Do you find yourself serving as a bridge between the Jewish and black communities? Are social justice issues important to you? I do, but to a point. I don't want to be emblematic of the flashpoints. That makes me a fireman, not a thinker. The day-to-day work of spiritual healing and repair, understanding, and safe boundaries and entry points ... that excites me, not fighting little social media battles. Social justice has become a dirty term for some on the Right, and I really think it is for them because advocacy for historically marginalized groups is a threat. So, the work must continue. I like being a conduit and communicator. It's hard work, but you do it.

Early in *The Cooking Gene*, you discuss a way of viewing ancestry as "action and reaction." What does that mean? It's a dialogue. It's a call and response. There are unquestionable analogies to our music and conversation. You also realize you create in many ways how the next chapter will go. And then beyond that.



The black tradition is specific about our relationship with the past being an active and very personal one. Jewish traditions have their own affirmations of past informing the present. Both demand a kind of moral and ethical descent alongside a physical and genetic one. You become responsible for a connection and then you pass that on.

In *The Cooking Gene* you write, "Our food was never just food. It was medicine and a gateway to good fortune, and a mystical lubricant between the living and the dead." How does the preparing and eating of kosher foods mix with the Southern cuisine? Is it really "a gateway to good fortune"? Black women [working in Jewish kitchens] innovated the fusion food of immigrant Jewish cuisines and Afro-Southern foodways. I think it's important to note that these women kept the family food kosher more than most of those families might have cared to themselves. When African-American women were employed post-slavery—through and beyond the civil rights era—they essentially used the kitchen as a negotiation space between old-world European Jewish foodways and deeply rooted African-based Southern traditions. Matzoh ball gumbo and matzoh meal fried chicken are real, as are sweet potato tzimmes or black-eyed peas and kishkes!

The traditional food isn't all fried and doused in butter. It's based on natural foods elevated in their natural taste to the state of delicacy. This kind of nuanced simplicity is at the heart of it. Southern black food is remarkably healthy, but the key is not to overindulge in the celebration foods. Fried chicken and macaroni and cheese are definitely celebration foods. This food came from the water, air, and earth—not just pots of lard.

My AfroAshkefardi [African-Ashkenazic-Sephardic] food is culinary intersectionality. I want people to eat their way across the diasporas without feeling some kind of awful, trite, forced fusion. This is about the energy and possibilities of the crossroads, not the transgressions of culture bubbles and boundaries. There are stories to tell, ethereal ingredients to include—satire, survival, ostentation, pain—and all are necessary parts of the food I cook.

Is there a spiritual side to wanting to discover and know one's roots? How does genealogy help one confront the history of oppression? Genealogy is critical. Especially if you're oppressed. Erasure is always there, threatening your very being. The Torah itself has huge sections devoted to detailing the roots and family lines of the patriarchs and beyond. Truth or not, it speaks to a very deep need to be anchored and valid when a constant urge to annihilate you is ever present, ready to scrub the record clean.

For me knowing what I know about my West and Central African forebears is a special kind of knowledge that taps into spaces of mind, body, and spirit that were inaccessible before. The ethnicities I come from feel like distinct family lines feeding my character and drive. That's incredibly reassuring. I'm more convinced than ever that my ancestors are my board of directors.

It appears we are just sitting down at the table and passing around the first plates of research. *The Cooking Gene* includes a very good bibliography. What are the challenges facing future scholars in your field? We need to understand the 50 cultures and more that fed into the streams of humans that made up the slave trade. Language, material culture, beliefs must all be fully investigated. We have to look at them from both a historical lens and a contemporary perspective. Another thing is that we have to stop pretending that we aren't losing history now. We have to interview black folks who migrated or immigrated. Our African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latinx foodways did not become static. They have evolved and changed and taken on regional forms and realities. It's so critical that we get the voices of that generation, so we can update our narrative and preserve those voices.

I've always felt that the center of one's home should be the kitchen and not the living room or bedroom. What's the power of the kitchen? The word *hearth*, meaning the central fire where food preparation happened, is related to the word *heart*. In an African context, the hearth is a sacred and holy space. It's a natural gathering place, a memory space, a clearing house of emotions; it's where we become families. ❖

E. Ethelbert Miller is a literary activist and hosts the podcast *On The Margin* (WPFW FM). He interviewed Twitty by email earlier this year.

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SOJOURNERS

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS ARE ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEEKING NEW AUDIENCES.



A

At higher educational arts institutions, green has become the new black. In the last year, museums at Bowdoin College, Brown University, Princeton University, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Maryland, University of Michigan, University of Utah, and Yale University have convened environmental and climate change-focused programming and exhibitions, with titles ranging from “Sea of Troubles: Rising Seas & Sinking Cities” to “Before the Deluge: Apocalyptic Floodscapes from John Martin to John Goto, 1789 to Now.”

The focus on nature and the dangers facing the environment raises the

Visual Art

question: Are there unique opportunities and challenges for college and university art museums when addressing the environment? And more fundamentally: Can an art exhibit do more than simply preach—albeit beautifully—to the choir?

First and foremost, the humanities offer “effective, compelling storytelling,” according to Jeffrey J. Cohen, dean of humanities at Arizona State University, co-president of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, and a teacher of en-



vironmental humanities. “Narrative—whether in words, pictures, or film—is the best technology we have for making the inhuman scale of climate change understandable.” The data that environmental science generates isn’t always compelling, he said, because it isn’t storytelling. “The arts and the humanities know how to change hearts as well as minds.”

According to Karl Kusserow, curator of American art at the Princeton University Art Museum, visual art—unlike literature, which traverses time—occupies physical space and occurs in a particular place. It therefore is “a powerful physical way to materialize and manifest ideas,” such as insights about climate change.

“A lot of the work that needs to happen in terms of changing minds has already been done on college campuses,” said Kusserow. “It’s really beyond that that an exhibition about environmental concerns can do its greatest work.” Earlier this year, Princeton’s museum showed “Nature’s Nation: American Art and Environment.” The show traveled to the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass., and will be at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Ark., until early September.

“One challenge is making it clear that university- and college-based museums are for everyone, not just for those in higher education,” said Matthew Hargraves, chief curator of art collections at the Yale Center for British Art, who helped organize Yale’s recent exhibit “Before the Deluge.” The free-of-charge exhibit tackled topics no less consequential than the apocalypse, the environment, and climate change. It did this, said Hargraves, “to reach as broad an audience as we possibly can in an engaging way.”

At Bowdoin College in Maine, the art museum closed the exhibit “Material Resources: Intersections of Art and the Environment” in June. The show, said Honor Wilkinson, curatorial assistant and manager of student programs, provoked questions and encouraged conversations about humanity’s relationship with the environment through artworks from antiquity to the present. Among the topics with which the exhibit grappled were the myth of the frontier, conservation

of the land, ecotourism, displacement of Indigenous Peoples, 20th-century industrialization, fossil fuels, pollution, urbanization, and suburbanization.

“As a campus museum, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art provides an invaluable forum to explore interdisciplinary connections between environmental studies and visual art, and to illuminate the intersected social, political, and cultural ecologies of both,” said Wilkinson. “The culture of a liberal arts institution encourages the questioning of the status quo.”

Last year, at the University of Colorado Boulder, the Nature, Environment, Science, and Technology (NEST) Studio for the Arts

showed its inaugural exhibit “EMBRYONIC.” The exhibit focused on the intersection of science and art and could be viewed, according to the university, with “a sense of urgency for a world beset with endocrine disruptors, rising sea levels, and rampant resource competition.”

Tara L. Knight, associate professor of critical media practices at Boulder and co-director of NEST, said the program is uniquely positioned to help faculty and students collaborate “across traditionally siloed departments” and to bring outside experts in to share their research. Last summer, a fellowship paired graduate students in mechanical engineering and ceramics, for example. A mechanical engineering student, who studies air quality in nail salons, found the air to be nearly as hazardous as that on oil rigs. He worked with a ceramics student to create an aesthetically pleasing air purifier that can hang on a wall—a better option for the workers than wearing gas masks.

“Academic publishing is, of course, an important part of the research process,” said Knight. “Yet pairing artists and scientists to work together to find new modes of expression is a challenging and rewarding way to think about our roles as educators and researchers.”

**“THE ARTS AND
THE HUMANITIES
KNOW HOW TO
CHANGE HEARTS AS
WELL AS MINDS.”**

Menachem Wecker is a freelance reporter based in Washington, D.C. He holds a graduate degree in art history from George Washington University.



SONGS OF COURAGE

Grammy winner and civil rights icon Mavis Staples offers a powerful message of faith and justice in her 17th album, *We Get By*. Backed by funk rhythm and gospel-inspired vocals, Staples' textured voice implores listeners to "be brave in a scary world" and "pray some-time" to bring about much-needed change.

Anti/Epitaph



HORROR AND TRUTH

By Abby Olcese

"I love the truth I find in dark films."

In a 2003 speech titled "A Filmmaker's Progress," *Sinister* and *Doctor Strange* filmmaker Scott Derrickson, a Christian, made this statement in reference to spiritual and moral themes in his work. It's an interesting idea to consider, not only because tales of terror get more popular this time of year, but also because Derrickson does most of his work in horror, a genre that doesn't often get positive associations with faith.

Horror is typically considered exploitative, good for nothing more than the basest forms of gratuitousness that cinema can offer. But in fact horror is a smarter, more diverse genre than it's given credit for. It is one of the best cinematic vehicles for social commentary. The best horror films remind us that evil exists and that none of us are exempt from it. They ask us to question our feelings of complacency and security and engage with uncertainty. They are, as Derrickson puts it, about truth in the dark.

Filmmakers' use of visceral thrills as an accessible conduit for complicated, taboo issues goes all the way back to horror's early roots in gothic literature. Think of *Frankenstein's* consideration of responsibility in the face of progress or *Jane Eyre's* practical, empowered heroine.

For a modern cinematic example, Jennifer Kent's film *The Babadook* is about a woman struggling with single motherhood, wrapped in psychological terror akin to *The Shining*. This is both an honest emotional expression of its main character's psyche and an entertaining way for wider audiences to dig into its feminist central themes.

The same is also true for messaging around civil rights and racial injustice. As writer Tananarive Due says in the documentary *Horror Noire*, "black history is black horror."

Black-produced horror films such as *Ganja & Hess*, *Tales from the Hood*, and *Get Out* speak to issues of addiction, police brutality, and institutional racism, providing their own version of truth in the dark.

Horror also addresses the spiritual. Darren Aronofsky's fascinating, controversial religious allegory *mother!* managed to cram commentary on the entire Bible and modern religion into a two-hour movie. Horror's preoccupation with mortality—addressed in films such as David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* and Ari Aster's *Midsommar*—provide entry to discussions about the soul, the afterlife, and how we engage with our temporary physical forms.

Proverbs 18:15 tells us "an intelligent mind acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge." We gain spiritual wisdom by engaging with difficult subject matter that challenges our beliefs from a hopeful, kingdom-minded perspective. Horror allows us to become more critical, discerning viewers and to question our cultural certainties. It asks: Does our truth hold up to the dark? ❖

Abby Olcese (@abbyolcese) is a freelance film critic and writer based in Kansas.

Art and State

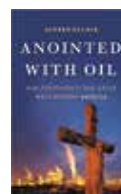
Be Recorder: Poems is a shockingly personal yet sharply political collection. Carmen Giménez Smith's fluid free verse offers an urgent reckoning of self and nation. Giménez calls Americans to account for their complicity in upholding a power-and-profit-driven model and forges the path toward a redefined America.

Graywolf Press

Crude Faith

Darren Dochuk's *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* tells how America's infatuation with oil gave rise to an American exceptionalism deeply embedded in the Christian faith. Dochuk writes that oil, hailed as a blessing from God, has now become an "imprint on America's soul."

Basic Books



MYTH AND MERITOCRACY

By
Faith-Marie
Zamblé



Curated

In his seminal work *Mythologies*, French philosopher and critical theorist Roland Barthes announces that “Myth is a type of speech.” And not simply any type of speech, but a dangerous kind. Myth is problematic,

he says, because it allows a fictional brand of naturalism to subsume history. It creates a false narrative that the way things are is the way things are meant to be, leaving ample room for injustice to flourish.

Recently, the playwright Jeremy O. Harris tackled one particular section of American mythos: education. And, in typical Jeremy O. Harris fashion, his exploration is complicated.

I went to see Harris’ fantastical play “Yell: A ‘Documentary’ of My Time Here” in a state of fear and excitement, wondering what dirty laundry he would air about my then-future intellectual home. The play is a record of Harris’ time at the Yale School of Drama, which is referred to in the production by actual yells from cast members in lieu of the name itself. One of the best qualities of “Yell” is its deconstructive bent, trained with razor-sharp focus on the codependent relationship fostered between prestigious institutions and the marginalized students who “diversify” their campuses. If the idea of an equitable education is a myth, Harris seems to be saying, it is fostered by people who need to believe in it, mainly those who America intends to disenfranchise.

And therein lies the paradox: The people the system was built to exclude are often the ones who see its flaws the clearest, as well as the ones who need the most institutional support.

For those of us without generational wealth, as I am, or those raised by immigrant parents, as I was, education is generally touted as the main path to self-determination. After all, if you, like my Jamaican grandparents, came from a country that was only willing to provide a high school education (or less), knowledge truly is representative of power.

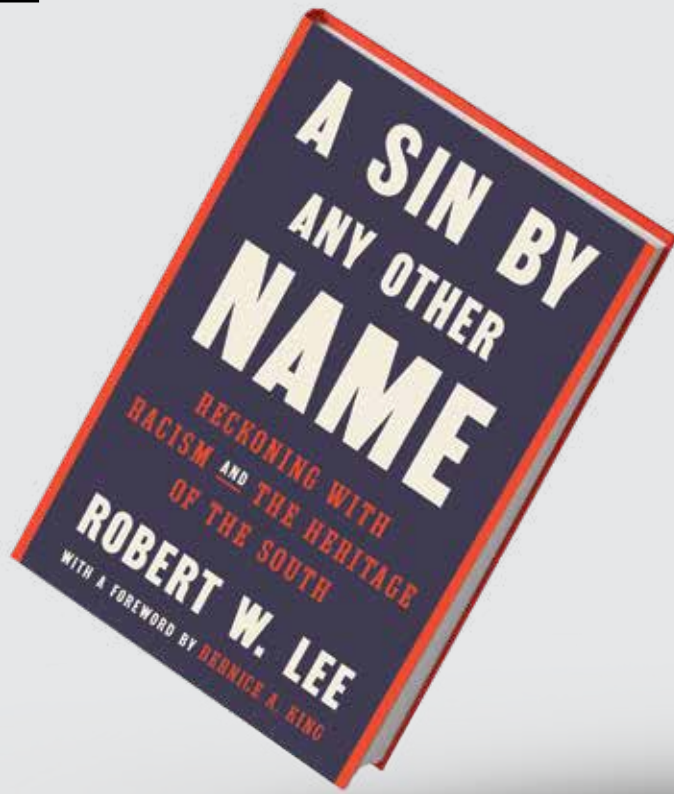
In Harris’ hands, however, that same phrase takes on a sinister resonance when a “master” teacher informs her class that “Knowledge is power because power is power; therefore, knowledge is power squared.” Who gets to access this power, and at what cost?

Many people of color are taught that we need to be the smartest in the room, twice as good as our white peers. It’s difficult to not lose ourselves in this game of measuring our being in relation to oppressive structures. To quote a sermon I heard the other day, “Net worth is connected to power and privilege, but it is not connected to freedom.” People of color in largely white fields should remind ourselves that our worth and membership in the beloved community is unrelated to our accomplishments, and that when the world is renewed, there will be no more meritocracies.

Until we get there, though, I’ll content myself with yelling about it. ✨

**OUR MEMBERSHIP
IN THE BELOVED
COMMUNITY IS
UNRELATED TO OUR
ACCOMPLISHMENTS.**

Faith-Marie Zamblé is an artist, writer, and MFA candidate in dramaturgy and dramatic criticism at the Yale School of Drama.



PLAYING WITH FIRE

A Sin by Any Other Name:
Reckoning with Racism and
the Heritage of the South,
by Robert W. Lee IV

Convergent Books

A Sin by Any Other Name is a memoir about grappling with being a descendant of Confederate general Robert E. Lee. Author Robert W. Lee IV, a minister who resigned from his pastorate in the midst of controversy following an anti-racism speech he made at the 2017 MTV Video Music Awards, discussed his book with Sojourners culture and review editor Da'Shawn Mosley.

Da'Shawn Mosley: What inspired this book?

Robert W. Lee IV: I'm a pastor first. But the events in Charlottesville, and our nation's response, terrified me and inspired me to put pen to paper and say, "We gotta talk about this, because if we don't, our silence becomes complicity."

"HAD I TOED THE PARTY LINE IN THE CHURCH I SERVED, I WAS IN DANGER OF LOSING MY SOUL."

This summer marks the second anniversary of the white supremacy violence in Charlottesville. What is your read of where we are as a nation? Charlottesville will live in our collective history as an event of great horror. It was domestic terrorism. As we move forward, especially in the 2020 election, we're going to have to talk about the deep chasm of racism that exists in our country without using it as a pandering mechanism to get votes. It's important for us to care and be deeply concerned about these issues.

As a white man, how have you navigated wanting to be an ally and not be at the forefront of the movement while at the same time being catapulted into the public spotlight? It's a learning experience. I hate to put it like that, but it is. There are times when I mess up horribly and say something wrong or am in the spotlight too long, which is why I'm trying to be careful with this book not to make it about me, because it's ultimately not about me. It's about a story that's been going on far longer than I've been alive. But I happen to have a particular part in this story that I have to be a part of, and so it's finding that balance of being willing to speak up and take the punches, but also being willing to sink when others

need to be in the forefront.

Christians who stand against injustice sometimes feel forced to leave their faith communities. Do you have advice for anyone in this position? People are having to make that decision more and more, because there's less and less moderate churches than there used to be, and I don't know if that's entirely a bad thing. But I do know that people are going to have to remember Jesus' words, when he said: What good is it to gain the whole world but lose your own soul? I was in danger, had I toed the party line in the church I served, of losing my soul, and I wasn't going to do that. I was terrified when I left my church. How would I pay the bills? What would this mean for me? But it also really wasn't about me. It was about something bigger than me. We have to remember that we're playing with fire, both the fire of Pentecost and the fire of what people do in this world. ✕

A TALE OF FEVERED CAPITALISM

Severance,
by Ling Ma

Farrar, Straus, and Giroux



A

"After the End came the Beginning." This is how we enter the world of Ling Ma's debut novel *Severance*: in the liminal space between end and possibility. In a narrative that alternates between aftermath and memory, we find a stark reflection of our present.

Protagonist Candace Chen works for a book production company, and her specialty is the acquisition of Bibles. Tedious office work. She has lost her parents, recently left a relationship, and lives alone in Manhattan when news of a spreading illness—Shen Fever—erupts. The fever begins in China, in a region that produces the Gemstone Bible, one of Candace's specialty Bibles. Before and during this outbreak, work, for Candace, is at once sustenance and distraction.

Who can live outside capitalism? Jonathan, Candace's ex, certainly tries. But that is not the life Candace wants—or, rather, that is not the life her immigrant parents raised her to want. Her decision to stay in New York, even as her staff thins and the city's streets empty on account of the fever, reveals the complexities of consumerist culture, particularly the way the culture makes it so that the people most vulnerable to it become most reliant on it.

Consider Candace's parents. When Ruifang Yang and her husband, Zhigang Chen, arrive in the United States, Zhigang sinks into the work of his PhD. But Ruifang has nothing and feels trapped. Afraid of losing his wife, Zhigang decides they will do "things they didn't normally do, American things." They find what solace they can in the American consumerist culture. Later, the couple—who are not religious—seek out the familiar at a Chinese Christian community church. Candace reflects upon the comfort her mother found in the routine of prayer: "She practically invented her own life in America by praying."

As much as *Severance* is about family and memory, it is also about cities, New York City most of all. Cities as mythology, as places of growth, failure, and false promises. "The city was posited as the ultimate consolation," Candace tells us.

This is not unlike how Bob, the leader of the group Candace joins in the post-apocalyptic sprawl, dangles the promise of the "Facility"—a location said to be safe from the fever—to control his followers. The novel echoes our frightening reality: a world where the powerful constantly craft narratives to fur-

**HER DECISION
REVEALS THE
COMPLEXITIES
OF CONSUMERIST
CULTURE.**

ther dehumanize the vulnerable.

At once critical and poignant, *Severance* captures the condition of "moving forward" in a capitalistic, consumerist world that does not allow rest. In our exhaustion, we return to the reliable, to faith and memories of family, where we seek comfort when the world plunges into chaos. In *Severance*, Ling Ma has written a powerful story, one of the more necessary reads of our time. ✧

Elinam Agbo holds an MFA from the University of Michigan's Helen Zell Writers' Program. Born in Ghana, she grew up in the U.S. Midwest.

Theater



**WE HAVE RIGHTS NOT ENUMERATED
IN THE CONSTITUTION
THAT MAY NOT BE VIOLATED.**

at the side, and sometimes explaining the rules of the speech debate competition, is an American Legion representative, played on Broadway by Mike Iveson.

He listens and observes as Schreck moves through tales about her abused grandmother, her own navigation of women's rights, and the basic lack of protections for women in the U.S. The history of domestic violence in her family consistently lurks under the surface of this play, and she links it with why the Ninth Amendment is so important: It says that the rights mentioned in the Constitution "shall not be construed to deny or disparage" any rights not named there. In other words, we have rights that are not enumerated in the Constitution that may not be violated.

It is this amendment, she teaches us, that led to advancements such as the women's right to vote, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the interpretation of the Constitution to uphold gay rights. But is it enough? She wonders with us and allows us to wonder back.

Leading us to the play's final moments, Schreck brings onstage a current female New York City high school student to debate her about

whether or not we need a new constitution. They draw lots for the pro and con sides and then, live in front of us, construct arguments and present them in the style of the American Legion Oratorical Contest. It's a brilliant moment that ends differently every performance.

"What the Constitution Means to Me" was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best Play. It didn't win either, but it's winning hearts and minds on Broadway. Now, the play's producers have announced a national tour, beginning in 2020. Don't miss it when it comes to your town. ✕

Stephanie Sandberg is an assistant professor of theater and film studies at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va.

What the
Constitution
Means to Me,
by Heidi Schreck

BUT IS IT ENOUGH?

When you walk into the theater, you feel you're at an American Legion community center, with hundreds of framed male portraits lining the walls. It's a little daunting. And then Heidi Schreck as a young woman arrives to give her speech, "What the Constitution Means to Me."

She explains that this is how she raised her state college tuition: winning speech and debate competitions about the Constitution, taking on the male power structures that surrounded her. Our 230-year-old Constitution is a wordy and tricky document, to say the least, and Schreck steps up to it with delightful rhetoric, full presence, and comic genius. She shows us why we should be in love with it and why we should uphold it.

But then things shift, and she comes to us, blazer tossed aside, as a now-40-something woman with wisdom and deep questions. The second half of the play takes us on a whirlwind history of the document with all of its problems, especially how this male-conceived, male-written constitution suppressed and continues to suppress women. Sitting quietly

Above:
Playwright
and actress
Heidi Schreck

FAITH TIDES

By Elisa Crawley



I am Peter at Gethsemane
where I wake to oak
branches suspended,
spinning like hair in water.

Flora's night
blanched, a prophet's
chanting, every caesura's
quiet steeping, transfiguring
grief to alms.

Stop rhythmic
pleas from your verdant
altar, Rabbi,
you rise, taken,
innocent,
like a border child.

I am chasing
you and dawn.
Not on waves
but in anxiety's
throes with doubt
staining my tongue.

Elisa Crawley, a graduate student at Boston College, was recently chosen by Boston poet laureate Porsha Olayiwola to be part of the mayor's poetry program.

Coming Up at the Beecken Center of the School of Theology in Sewanee, Tennessee

Deep Green Faith: Holy Forest Kinship

Sept. 6-7, 2019

Join Matthew Sleeth, Karen Kuers, Robin Gottfried, and Connie Keetle as they explore the relationship between faith and ecology in an organic interweaving of religion, science, and the arts.



Faith and the Shack and Lies We Believe About God with Wm. Paul Young

Nov. 15-16, 2019

Come spend two days with best-selling author Wm. Paul Young as we explore faith and our relationship with God.



Other Events

Sept. 20-22, 2019

Education for Ministry (EfM) Graduates Retreat, St. Mary's Sewanee

Jan. 30-Feb. 1, 2020

Engaging Ministry: Practices of Prayer, Worship, and Community with the Rev. Stuart Higginbotham and Kate Eaton

March 2-6, 2020

The Art of Teaching Spiritual Discernment with Listening Hearts Ministries

March 6-7, 2020

Living a Resurrection-Shaped Life with the Rt. Rev. Jacob Owensby

Growing Faith. Transforming Lives.

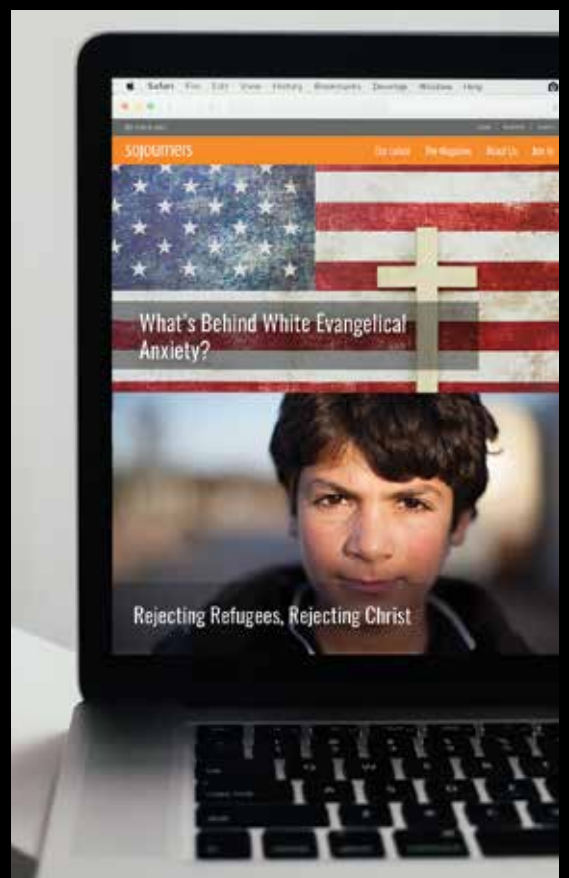
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THE LIFE-GIVING PRESENCE OF A DEBT-CANCELING GOD

Scripture passages
are from the Revised
Common Lectionary,
Cycle C.

By Kenyatta R. Gilbert



Living the Word

Wealth advisers teach us why and where to stockpile our assets and how to diminish our liabilities. “Save! Save! Save! Put away for rainy days. Establish your kid’s college nest egg now! Buy low and sell high! Get real estate to get more

bang for your buck! Don’t touch your 401(k) or you’ll risk having nothing for retirement!” And of course, they earnestly urge, “Set aside enough for taxes or be bitten by Uncle Sam in the end!” Any good wealth adviser aims to cure their clients of unsound “robbing Peter to pay Paul” financial practices. Managing portfolios calls for vigilance because markets can be highly volatile and thus vulnerable to external forces beyond one’s control. For this reason, sound investment strategy requires advanced planning, goal-setting, and staying focused. This month’s gospel readings address the importance of honoring one’s faith journey by carefully calculating costs and practicing disciplined stewardship.

These themes color the pages of Luke’s gospel but also inform Paul’s eldering counsel to his young devotee, Timothy. Paul writes: “There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment” (1 Timothy 6:6), for true satisfaction is discovered at the site of contentedness, not on “the uncertainty of riches” (verse 17).

Our spiritual ledgers get out of whack when wealth accrual is decoupled from gratitude and when we forsake practical wisdom. Dialing back the spiritual appetite for hoarding temporal goods is not only good stewardship but crucial for securing tomorrow’s sacred dividends. Having an appropriate perspective on wealth is the initial deposit for moving into the life-giving presence of a debt-canceling God.

Kenyatta R. Gilbert, founding director of The Preaching Project, is professor of homiletics at the Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, D.C. He is author of *A Pursued Justice* and *Exodus Preaching*.

FOLLOWING JESUS BINDS US TO THE LOCKED UP AND LOCKED OUT.

SEPTEMBER 1

FORSAKING FIDELITY

JEREMIAH 2:4-13; PSALM 81:1, 10-16;
HEBREWS 13:1-8, 15-16; LUKE 14:1, 7-14

Biblical storylines of God’s dealings with Israel vary little in terms of plot. The master narrative of unrequited love loops over and again in the prophetic literature. Taglines proceed in this order: “As they pursued worthless things, they forgot their first love and were forced to submit to the exacting demands of their foreign foes. Yet again, a faithful God is love-spurned by a prized people who contented themselves with serving lesser gods of their own making.” Sacred love tales of this sort get nauseating, at least I think so. One would think that a people with whom God is madly in love could get it together, right? But, because of our acts of spiritual infidelity, we humans exchange secured glory for things that do not profit us, forsaking living water in exchange for leaky cisterns that cannot hold water (Jeremiah 2:11, 13). A better conclusion to a sacred love story is praying open-heartedly: “Let not, O God, my serial disregard of the provisions you supply bring insult to your love—a love so undeserved.”

Spiritual infidelity causes believers to leave the finest wheat in the field and forsake the satisfaction of tasting sweet honey from the rock (Psalm 81:16—the source of justice-activist Bernice Johnson Reagon’s Grammy-winning acapella vocal ensemble’s name). Fidelity in faith is remembering that angels often masquerade as strangers and that following Jesus binds us to the locked up and politically locked out ones (Hebrews 13:2-3) legally subjected to, as Michelle Alexander writes, “employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote ... exclusion from jury-service” in America’s unforgiving debtors’ prisons.

SEPTEMBER 8

SPOILED AND REWORKED

JEREMIAH 18:1-11; PSALM 139:1-6, 13-18;
PHILEMON 1:1-21; LUKE 14:25-33

Except for a session of good rugged outdoor play, nothing brings Ava, my 9-year-old, greater joy after a stressful school day than flattening and twisting playdough or pulling apart “kid slime,” which she creates from Elmer’s glue, glitter, and borax. Correct apportionment of these ingredients is critical for prolonging shelf life and getting things rightly textured. Though inevitable messes come with the task, Ava takes full responsibility for what she creates and is unwilling to abandon the process until the slime’s consistency suits her purposes.

Reach back to the wisdom Jeremiah shares and gain similar perspective about humanity’s need for God-initiated mercy and reformation. Join Jeremiah at the potter’s wheel, where communal repentance stays the potter’s hands, though destroying the clay was on the agenda. Gospel singer Tramaine Hawkins lyricized this so well: “In case you have fallen by the wayside of life / dreams and visions shattered, you’re all broken inside / you don’t have to stay in the shape that you’re in / the potter wants to put you back together again / Oh, the potter wants to put you back together again.”

Making frequent trips to the potter’s house and seeing the potter at work meticulously twisting and flattening, restoring and refashioning life marred by sin would do us some good. Correspondingly, the psalmist remixes this sentiment of holy intimacy and sets it to song, “O Lord, you have searched me and known me. ... For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:1, 13-14a).

SEPTEMBER 15

LOST AND RECOVERED

JEREMIAH 4:11-12, 22-28; PSALM 14;
1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17; LUKE 15:1-10

In chapter 15 of Luke’s gospel, Jesus shares three parables. Each depicts something different about the reign of God. Three sets of circumstances, three distinctive responses, each symbolic of the human condition and how God responds to it. Each describes humanity’s great debt and each collapses into an allusion to Christ’s great payment. If these parables reveal nothing else, they at the very least show us that one does not get to joy without sacrifice. Salvation is for personal and social transformation. We humans repeatedly need deliverance from sin because

it impairs our ability to fulfill our God-given covenantal obligations.

Despite the multiple meanings of the concept of salvation, according to theologian Frederick L. Ware, Christians commonly hold to three notions about salvation. While quarrelling happens over “how,” the first commonly held affirmation is that Christ saves. A second affirmation is that divine action cannot be substituted or superseded by human action, which is to say that no matter how complemented by human endeavor, salvation does not happen without God’s activity or without God acting first. And third, salvation always implies that some transformation takes place, whether this means improvement of one’s life station, freedom from spiritual malady, rejoining the fold, or being found, like the unnamed woman’s silver drachma recovered after being negligently handled. Salvation merits celebration. “Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

SEPTEMBER 22

THE POVERTY OF WEALTH

JEREMIAH 8:18 - 9:1; PSALM 79:1-9;
1 TIMOTHY 2:1-7; LUKE 16:1-13

Psychologist Mardy Grothe coined the term *oxymoronica*, which he defines as tantalizing, self-contradictory statements or observations that on the surface appear false or illogical, but at a deeper level are true, profoundly true. For instance, Jean-Paul Sartre’s statement “Life begins on the other side of despair” or the Confucian aphorism “Real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s own ignorance” are each emblematic of the term.

As Luke 16 puts it, self-preservation directs the hired hand to bargain to make a cheater’s system more honest. Can we blame the alleged dishonorable manager, under indictment for squandering his master’s wealth, in an exploitative system? Has he not run out of options? Desperate times call for quick thinking and a dose of shrewdness. One-time debt forgiveness in a corrupt payday loan system, for example, constitutes a temporary fix. When systems are rigged, many people will soon find themselves indebted again if selfsame social policies persist; they will repeatedly find themselves at

the mercy of the manager who will not relent. Clearing poor people’s ledgers without providing job training, wealth-building options, and educational opportunity ensures more poverty. Freedom until the next failed crop or the next needed subsidy is no security. If one must act shrewdly to beat a system that devalues honest brokering, then the system cannot be trusted to be just in the end. The best security for the “children of light” (verse 8), Jesus oxymoronically suggests in Luke, is to make friends by means of dishonest wealth in order to find welcome into “the eternal homes” (verse 9).

SEPTEMBER 29

STORING UP CONTENTMENT

JEREMIAH 32:1-3A, 6-15; PSALM 91:1-6; 14-16;
1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19; LUKE 16:19-31

Englishman Lord Acton’s dictum “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” parallels in sentiment Paul’s wise counsel to his protegee Timothy. “Beware Timothy,” Paul fervently advises, “loving money is a snare and becomes the source of all manner of evil” (see 1 Timothy 6:10). Differently put, greedy power has no end. To Acton’s credit, his knack for naming reality in the context of empire is remarkable for one whose pedigree came from a colonizing race of people. Acton writes: “There is not a more perilous or immoral habit of mind than the sanctifying of success.”

The rich man dressed in purple garb who dined sumptuously every day, signifying his immense wealth and extravagant taste, condemns himself to perpetual torment in the afterlife because he put purse before principle. Conversely, Lazarus, the poor man who had suffered greatly in his earthly life, finds consolation, contentment, and surcease after dying. In death the rich man is judged harshly not because he had acquired immense wealth. Rather, he deservingly, as the parable illustrates, is banished to Hades—the place of eternal torment—because he lacked compassion, trivialized the plight of the suffering poor, and ignored mercy extended to him while living (Luke 16:19-25). Adding “godliness” (*eusebeia*) or “religion” combined with “contentment” (1 Timothy 6:6-7) to one’s spiritual portfolio is a reminder for us to see that we brought nothing into this world and can take nothing to the grave with us. ✕

“Living the Word” reflections for October can be found at sojo.net/magazine. “Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

**SALVATION IS FOR PERSONAL
AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION.**

H'rumps



CAN WE BUILD AN ECONOMY WITHOUT LOSING OUR SOULS? (Nah)

By Ed Spivey Jr.

With the nation's economy on the brink of another crisis (what, you haven't heard?) and major banks expecting their feckless greed to again be punished with a harsh government bailout, what can we citizens do to help? We can shop, that's what. It's our patriotic duty.

In this capitalistic democracy we cast a vote for freedom every time we make a purchase. The more we buy, the more freedom we celebrate. (I didn't just buy cat food this morning, I made a profound statement about America. And I'll make it again when I go back for the cat litter that I forgot.)

The Founders might not have had this in mind when they conceived our republic, but they never felt the joy of buying a 24-pack of tuna at Costco, did they? In fairness, the privations of colonial America made it difficult to imagine our coming greatness, but Patrick Henry was prescient when he said, "Give me free shipping or give me death. Well, not death per se. I just really want free shipping."

If only he had lived 200 years longer, he would have experienced the greatest consumer society in the world. (Although, at the age of 280-something, he probably would have moved to Canada for its superior geriatric care.) Of course, with greatness comes responsibility. It's not enough to have purchasing power if it doesn't benefit our own people, the hard-working Americans who used to make the things we buy but now mainly deliver them.

Which is why I only buy in America. I never go out of America

I ALWAYS BUY IN AMERICA.
IT'S THE PATRIOTIC
THING TO DO.

for anything. I bought my Japanese car in America; my new colander came from an American store after it was shipped from Vietnam. And I bought my new bamboo back scratcher not from Japan, where it was made, but on the American internet. (It's great for getting at those hard-to-reach spots, and also useful during city council meetings. "The chair recognizes the gentleman with the teeny little hand.")

But we Christian justice types have concerns about this hyper-capitalistic economy. It's difficult to find our values in it. (Is it wrong to look for "reduce, reuse, and recycle" in a Nike ad?) And it's especially challenging when surrounded by the tempting bounty of Satan. I mean Amazon. For people who value work and the worth it conveys, buying from Amazon seems hypocritical, albeit hypocritical like a fox, who enjoys convenience, unlimited selection, and quick delivery.

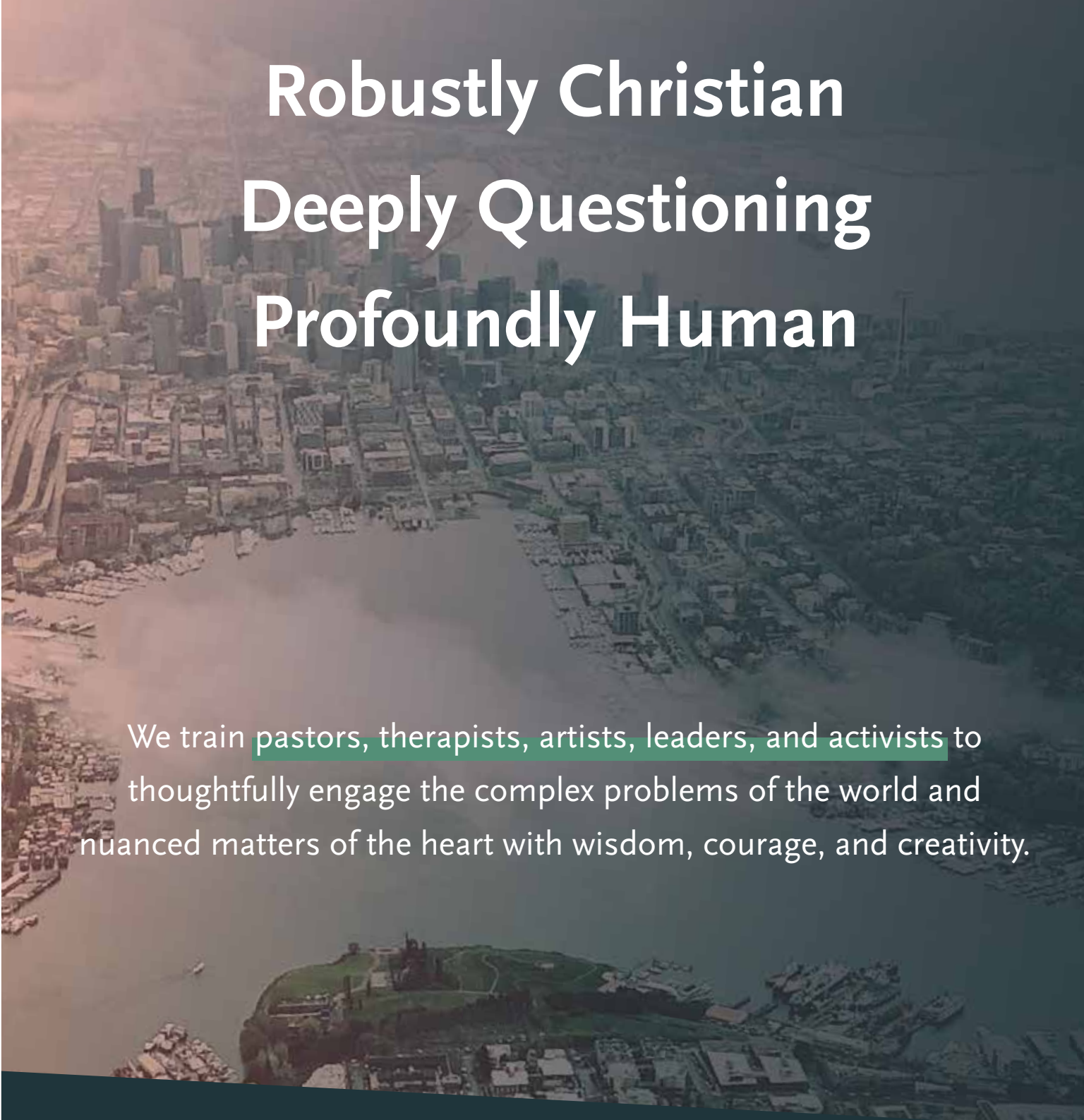
But Amazon only values its workers until the robots come. Which begs the question: Do we choose the path of Christian empathy for the dignity of the worker, or take the road to rapacious consumption? And is the difference mainly free shipping? (Satan says: "Come on, free shipping!!")

It shouldn't be a hard choice. Amazon is systematically destroying what's left of the small businesses Walmart didn't destroy already. And for years I proudly boycotted Walmart, driving past its stores into small-town America when I needed something, such as batteries. And then I'd drive back to Walmart because small-town America doesn't have batteries anymore, just coffee shops and gift stores. (I felt guilty afterward, of course, so I listened to two TED Talks as penance. It's a great way to feel you're actively engaging with the issues, when you're really just listening to the radio in your kitchen.)

But what to do? Keep it simple: Consume only what you need, consider the source, honor the work, respect the worker.

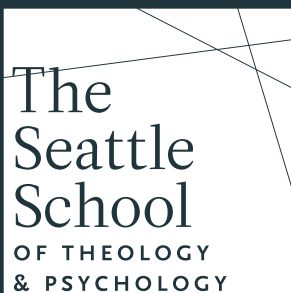
And use that new Facebook money. It's another great idea from Silicon Valley, right Alexa? *

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of *Sojourners* magazine.

An aerial photograph of Seattle, Washington, showing the city skyline, the waterfront, and the surrounding area. The image is used as a background for the top half of the page.

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